# A PUBLISHER'S CONFESSION

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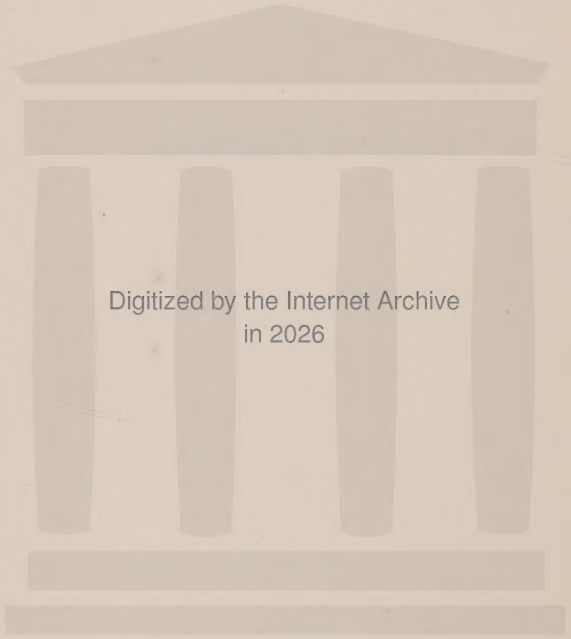

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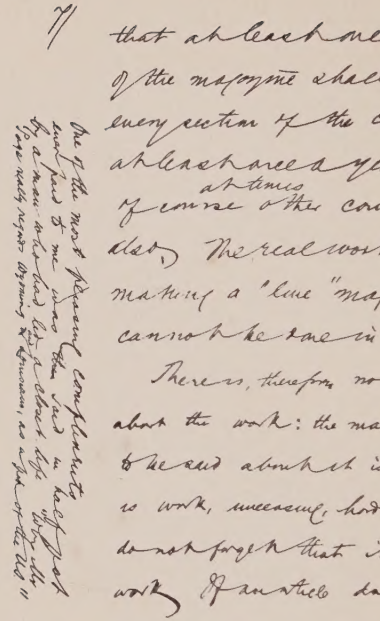

Even when hurriedly written, as this facsimile manuscript page from his article on "What the *World's Work* is Trying To do" obviously was, "copy" from the pen of the late Walter H. Page was so unfailingly legible and accurate as to its grammar, spelling, and punctuation, that it went straight to the typesetting machines precisely as written without necessitating the usual ministrations of the "copy editor."

# A Publisher's Confession

By

Walter H. Page

With an Introduction by

F. N. Doubleday

NEW EDITION

Garden City New York
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1923

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

There is expressed in these chapters so much that is practical and of interest to those engaged in the various branches of authorship, book-making and book-selling that the present publishers have availed themselves of the permission of the Boston *Transcript*, in which they originally appeared, to gather them together in book form.

NEW YORK, *March*, 1905.

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# INTRODUCTION TO NEW EDITION

One of the extraordinary things about Mr. Page's letters and editorial writings was his sense for what the future held—a vision which amounted almost to the gift of prophecy. This quality has struck every reader of the recently published LIFE AND LETTERS.

Here in this book, the larger part written originally in the form of letters for the *Boston Transcript*, we meet the same far-seeing quality. In my close and almost daily association with him, dating back to 1898, all the topics in this book were matters of endless talk. Even then he not only looked forward to conditions which exist to-day in publishing, but had visions of publishing as

it will exist many years hence. He forecast, for example, the widened demand for serious books, some of which are now distributed in numbers that would have made a novel successful two decades ago. He anticipated the vast increase in selling facilities, which have already doubled and will doubtless continue to grow until books are as easily accessible to the public as groceries or clothes.

His acceptance of Mr. Wilson's invitation to become the American Ambassador to Great Britain necessarily interrupted the close intimacy with his old associates and the affairs which had engrossed him for so many years; for no man, I believe, ever enjoyed his work more, and he always looked forward to taking up his editorial labors again when his term expired.

During the years of his absence he never lost interest in his calling; his letters always called for news of our publishing affairs, and they were among the

most interesting letters he wrote—scores of them composed during days and nights of greatest stress, always in his own hand, always balanced, calm, and quaintly humorous. We who were his old intimates felt that they were something more than letters—they were the expressions of his thoughtful philosophy worked out with the pen as he was accustomed to think out public matters in the editorials which he wrote for the *World's Work* for nearly fifteen years.

Readers of those editorials may remember kindliness and optimism as their dominant qualities. A phrase that we often chaffed him about, he used as the beginning of many editorials: "the cheerful fact is——" Then invariably followed the bright side of a sombre subject. He never, I believe, wrote an editorial which failed to indicate the bright side.

This leads me to speak of another quality which he had beyond any man

I ever knew: a strong interest in every person with whom he came in contact, if the new acquaintance was not absolutely and hopelessly dull. When a stranger came into his office, he was welcomed with facial expression and manner that seemed to say: "I wonder what you can tell me of interest." No matter how busy or pressed he might be, I never knew him to show it in his actions. He was ever courteous, quick, and interested. Perhaps that was to a great extent the reason he gained such widespread affection in England.

The re-publication of this book is worth while because it is full of sound publishing philosophy. The ideas and principles here set forth, his old associates will strive to carry on, and to those who were his intimates these pages are of great significance and inspiration.

F. N. Doubleday.

# The Ruinous Policy of Large Royalties

# A Publisher's Confession

## CHAPTER I

### THE RUINOUS POLICY OF LARGE ROYALTIES

*How it Operates to the Disadvantage of Both Author and Publisher—The Actual Facts and Figures—Authors' Earnings Greatly Exaggerated by the Press—Books Sell Too Cheaply—What a Fair Price for All Concerned Would Be.*

The author of a very popular book, who has written another that will be as popular, wishes me to publish it, so he is kind enough to say; and he came to see me and asked on what terms I would bring it out. In these strenuous times he can dictate his own terms to his publisher; and I happened to know that two houses had made him offers.

I confess, since I am old-fashioned, that this method of an author shocks me. If he does not openly hawk his book and his reputation, he at least tempts one publisher to bid against another, and thus invites the publisher to regard it as a mere commodity. But I suppressed my dislike of the method and went straight about the business of getting the book, for I should like to have it.

"I will give you," I said, "twenty per cent. royalty, and I will pay you $5,000 on the day of publication."

The words had not fallen from my mouth before I wished to recall them, for the publishing of books cannot be successfully done on these terms. There are only two or three books a year that can pay so much.

"I will consider it," said he.

Abject as I was, I recovered myself far enough to say: "No, the offer is made for acceptance now or never—

before this conversation ends. I cannot keep it open."

"My dear sir," I went on, for I was regaining something of my normal courage, "do you know what twenty per cent. royalty on a $1.50 book means? You receive thirty cents for every copy sold. My net profit is about four or five cents a copy, if I manufacture it well and advertise it generously; and I supply the money in advance. I make an advance to you; I pay the papermaker in advance of my collections, the printer —everybody; and I wait from ninety to one hundred and twenty days after the book is sold to get my money. My profit is so small that it may vanish and become a loss by any misadventure, such as too much advertising, the printing of too large an edition, or the loss of an account with a failed bookdealer. I have no margin as an insurance against accidents or untoward events. I am doing business with you on an unfairly

generous basis. I am paying you all the money that the book can earn—perhaps more than it can earn—for the pleasure of having you on my list. If I make money, I must make it on books for which I pay a smaller royalty."

"But I can get twenty per cent. from almost any other publisher," he replied, truthfully. "Why should I consider less from you?"

I could not answer him except by saying:

"Yes, I am not blaming you—not quite; but there is a grave fault in the system that has brought about this general result. You may have forgotten that this high royalty is a direct temptation to a publisher to skimp his advertising. You expect generous advertising of the book. Well, I can never sign an order for an advertisement of it without recalling the very narrow margin of profit that I have. An order for $500 worth of advertising will take as much

net profit as I can make on several thousand copies.

"Again, when I come to manufacture the book, I cannot help recalling that gilt letters on the cover will increase the cost by one cent or two cents a copy. You tempt me to do all my work in the cheapest possible way."

Well, we are good friends, this writer and I, and we signed the contract. He is to receive a royalty of twenty per cent., and a payment on his royalty account of $5,000 on the day of publication.

When, therefore, I had the pleasure of receiving the friends of another author, who told me that he would give me the book for twenty per cent. royalty ($5,000 cash on publication) if I cared to read it, I replied, "No."

### NO MONEY ON THAT BASIS

I had recovered. I said: "I cannot make money on that basis. Neither

can other legitimate and conscientious publishers, who build their business to last. I will let novels alone, if I must. I will do a small business—but sounder. If that is your condition, do not leave the book. I will pay you a sliding scale of royalties: I cannot give you twenty per cent."

And he went away. I had just as lief another publisher lost money on the book as to lose it myself. True, the public, the reading public and the writing public, will regard the success of the book (if it succeed) as evidence of a rival publisher's ability and enterprise. He will win temporary reputation. He will seem to be in the "swim" of success. He will publish flaming advertisements, in the hope of obtaining other successful authors; and he will attract them, for much book advertising is done not with the hope of selling the book, but chiefly to impress writers with the publisher's energy and generosity. But there's no

profit and great risk in business conducted in this way.

There is positive danger, in fact. And I owe it to myself and to all the men and women whose books I publish to see to it first of all that my own business is sound, and is kept sound. In no other way can I discharge my obligations to them and keep my publishing house on its proper level instead of on the level of a mere business shop.

The rise of royalties paid to popular authors is the most important recent fact in the publishing world. It has not been many years since ten per cent. was the almost universal rule; and a ten per cent. royalty on a book that sells only reasonably well is a fair bargain between publisher and author. If the publisher do his work well—make the book well, advertise it well, keep a well-ordered and well-managed and energetic house—this division of the profits is a fair division—except in the case of a

book that has a phenomenally large sale. Then he can afford to pay more. Unless a book has a pretty good sale, it will not leave a profit after paying more than a ten per cent. royalty.

Figure it for yourself. The retail price of a novel is $1.50.* The retail bookseller buys it for about ninety cents. The wholesale bookseller buys it from the publisher for about eighty cents. This eighty cents must pay the cost of manufacturing the book; of selling it; of advertising it; must pay its share towards the cost of keeping the publisher's establishment going—and this is a large and increasing cost; it must pay the author; and it must leave the publisher himself some small profit. Now, if out of this eighty cents which must be divided for so many purposes, the author receives a royalty of twenty per cent. (thirty cents a copy), there is left, of course, only fifty cents to pay all the other items. No other half-dollar

*Prices have risen since Mr. Page wrote his "Confession," but otherwise conditions are little changed.

in this world has to suffer such careful and continuous division! I have met a good many authors who have never realized that a ten per cent. royalty means nearly twenty per cent. on what the publisher actually sells the book for, and that a twenty per cent. royalty is nearly forty per cent. on the actual wholesale price.

There are several things of greater importance in the long run to an author than a large royalty. One of them is the unstinted loyalty of his publisher. His publisher must have a chance to be generous to his book. He ought not to feel that he must seek a cheap printer, that he must buy cheap paper, that he must make a cheap cover, that he must too closely watch his advertising account. A publisher has no chance to be generous to a book when he can make a profit on it only at the expense of its proper manufacture. The grasping author is, therefore, doing damage to his own book

by leaving the publisher no margin of profit.

### THE STABILITY OF THE PUBLISHER

There is still another thing that an author should set above his immediate income from any particular book; and that is the stability of his publisher. The publisher is a business man (he has need to be a business man of the highest type), but he is also the guardian of the author's property. If his institution be not sound and be not kept sound, the loss to the author in money and in standing may be very great. The embarrassment or failure of a publishing firm now and then causes much gossip; for a publishing house is a center of publicity. But nobody outside the profession knows what practical trouble and confusion and loss every failure or financial embarrassment costs the writing world. The normal sale of many books is stopped. The

authors lose in the end, and they lose heavily.

Every publisher who appreciates his profession tries to make his house permanent, with an eye not only to his own profit, but also to the service that he may do to the writers on his list. If it is of the very essence of banking that a bank shall be in sound condition and shall have the confidence of the community, it is even more true that a publishing house should be sound to the core and should deserve financial confidence. The publisher must do his business with reference to a permanent success. But if he must do business on the basis of a twenty per cent. royalty, he takes risks that he has no right to take. It deserves to be called "wild-cat" publishing.

I am, therefore, not making a plea, by this confession, for a larger profit to the publisher in any narrow or personal sense. Every successful publisher—

really successful, mind you—could make more money by going into some other business. I think that there is not a man of them who could not greatly increase his income by giving the same energy and ability to the management of a bank, or of some sort of industrial enterprise. Such men as Mr. Charles Scribner, Mr. George Brett, Mr. George H. Mifflin, could earn very much larger returns by their ability in banks, railroads or manufacturing, than any one of them earns as a publisher; for they are men of conspicuous ability.

It is, therefore, not as a matter of mere gain to the publisher that it is important to have the business on a sound and fair basis; but it is for the sake of the business itself and for the sake of the writers themselves.

### AN AUTHOR'S BLUNDER

Here is a true tale of a writer of good fiction: He made a most promising

start. His first book, in fact, caused him to be sought by several publishers, who do not hesitate to solicit clients—a practice that other dignified professions discourage. The publisher of his first book gave him a ten per cent. royalty. For his second book he demanded more. A rival publisher offered him twenty per cent. The second book also succeeded. But the author in the meantime had heard the noise of other publishing houses. He had made the acquaintance of another writer whose books (which were better than his) had sold in much greater quantities. Of course, the difference in sales could not be accounted for by the literary qualities of the books—his friend had a better publisher than he—so he concluded. His third book, therefore, was placed with a third publisher, because he would advertise more loudly. Well, that publisher failed. His failure, by the way, the report of the receivers

showed, was caused by spending too much in unproductive advertising.

Here our author stood, then, with three books, each issued by a different publishing house. What should he do with his fourth book? He came back to his second publisher, who had, naturally, lost some of his enthusiasm for such an author. To cut the story short, that man now has books on five publishers' lists. Not one of the publishers counts him as his particular client. In a sense his books are all neglected. One has never helped another. He has got no cumulative result of his work. He has become a sort of stray dog in the publishing world. He has cordial relations with no publisher; and his literary product has really declined. He scattered his influence, and he is paying the natural penalty.

The moral of this true story (and I could tell half a dozen more like it) is that a publisher is a business man, but

not a mere business man. He must be something more. He is a professional man also. He can do his best service only for those authors who inspire his loyalty, who enable him to make his publishing house permanent, and who leave him enough margin of profit to permit him to make books of which he can be proud.

The present fashion of a part of the writing world—to squeeze the last cent out of a book and to treat the publisher as a mere manufacturer and "boomer" —cannot last. It has already passed its high period and is on the decline. A self-respecting worm would have turned long ago. Even the publisher is now beginning to turn.

Better still, the authors whose books will be remembered longest have not caught the fashion of demanding everything. It was that passing school of "booms" and bellowing that did it all —the writers of romances for kitchen

maids and shop girls, whose measure of book values was by dollars only. Such fashions always pass. For, if novel writing be so profitable an industry, a large number of persons naturally take it up; and they ruin the market by overstocking it.

### THE "BOOMED" BOOK PASSING

Fast passing, then—praise God—is the "boomed" book, which, having no merit, could once be sold by sheer advertising, in several editions of 100,000 each. I have made a list of the writers of books that during the last five or six years have sold in enormous editions; and every one of these writers, but two, has lived to see his (or her) latest book sell far below its predecessors. One man, for instance, wrote a first book which sold more than 200,000 copies. His publishers announce only the sixtieth thousand of his latest novel, though it has now nearly run its course.

These are not pleasant facts. I wish that every novelist might have an increasing sale for every book he writes. They all earn more than they receive—even the bad ones whose books prosper; but the system that they brought with them deserves to die—must die, if publishing is to remain an honorable profession. They brought with them the 20 per cent. royalty, and the demand for an advertising outlay that was based on the sale of 100,000 or 200,000 copies. Only the keeper of dark secrets knows how many publishers have lost, or how large their losses have been, on "boomed" books. But any intelligent business man may take the 50 cents that the publisher receives for his $1.50 novel after paying the author's 20 per cent. royalty, and divide it thus:

Cost of manufacture,
Cost of selling,
Office expense,
Extravagant advertising,

Profit.

If he can find anything left for profit, then he can get rich at any business. There have been novels so extravagantly advertised that the advertising cost alone amounted to 22 cents for every copy sold. The writer drove the publisher to loss; the publisher (foolishly) consented in the hope of attracting other authors to his house. If "other authors" knew that the very cost of the bait that attracted them makes the publishing house unsound, they would not long be fooled.

Thus it comes about, in this strange and fascinating world of writing and making and selling books, that one period of "whooping up" novels is ending. Half the novels advertised during the past few years in big medicine style did not pay the publishers; and any conservative publisher can tell you which half they are.

The manufacturing novelist has al-

ways been with us. But he used to be an humble practitioner of the craft whose "output" was sold for ten cents a volume. He always will be with us, and his product will sell, some at ten cents a volume, some at $1.50. But the time seems about to pass when he can disturb the publishing situation. For the publisher has to accept his methods when he accepts his work; and his methods do not pay either in dignity, permanency, or cash. If any of these be lacking—and in proportion as they are lacking—the results will fall short of the ideal. The results to be hoped for are money, but not money only, but also a watchful care by the publisher over his author's reputation and growth, and a cumulative influence for his books.

### THE INCOME OF AUTHORS

There are, perhaps, a dozen American novelists who have large incomes from their work; there are many more who

have comfortable incomes; but there is none whose income is as large as the writers of gossip for the literary journals would have us believe. It has been said that Harper's Magazine pays Mrs. Humphry Ward $15,000 for the serial right of each of her stories and twenty per cent. royalty. Miss Johnston must have made from $60,000 to $70,000 from royalties on "To Have and to Hold," for any publisher can calculate it.

But along with these great facts let us humbly remember that Mr. Carnegie received $300,000,000 for all his steel mills, good will, etc.; for the authors that I have named are the "millionaires" of the craft. I wish there were more. But the diligent writers of most good fiction, hard as they have ground the publishers in the rise of royalties, are yet nearer to Grub street than they are to Skibo Castle.

The truth is—but it would be a diffi-

cult task to reduce such a truth to practice—that the public gets its good new novels too cheap. There is not a large enough margin of profit for author, publisher and bookseller in a new book that is meant to be sold for $1.50 and that is often sold for $1.08. The business of bookmaking and bookselling is underpaid. There is not a publisher in the United States who is today making any large sum of money on his "general trade." Money is made on educational books, on subscription books, on magazines. But publishing, as publishing, is the least profitable of all the professions, except preaching and teaching, to each of which it is a sort of cousin.

# Why "Bad" Novels Succeed and "Good" Ones Fail

## CHAPTER II

### WHY "BAD" NOVELS SUCCEED AND "GOOD" ONES FAIL

*The First May Have No Literary Quality, but They Have a Genuine Quality—Power of Construction the Main Thing in Story-Writing—Literary Reviews of Novels are Regarded as of Little Value by Publishers—Odd Incidents and Facts in the Business.*

A report on the manuscript of a novel made by a "literary" reader not long ago ended with this sentence: "This novel is bad enough to succeed." He expressed the feeling of a great many literary persons that fiction often succeeds in the market in proportion to its "badness." And surely there are many instances to support such a contention from the "Lamplighter" to "When Knighthood Was in Flower." But the

"literary" view of fiction is no more trustworthy than the "literary" view of politics or of commerce; for it concerns itself more with technique than with substance.

It is a hard world in which "Knighthood," "Quincy Adams Sawyer" and "Graustark," to say nothing of "The One Woman," "Alice of Old Vincennes" and a hundred more "poor" books make fortunes, while Mr. Howells and Mr. James write to unresponsive markets and even Mr. Kipling cannot find so many readers for a new novel as Mr. Bacheller of "Eben Holden." It seems a hard world to the professional literary folk; but the professional literary folk would find it a hard world anyhow; for it has a way of preferring substance to color. And novels, after all, have less to do with literature than they have to do with popular amusement.

Heaven forbid that I should make defence of bad writing, or of sensational

literature, or of bad taste, or of any other thing that is below grade; but, as between the professional literary class, and the great mass of men who buy "Eben Holdens" and "David Harums" the mass of men have the better case.

Why does a man read a novel? Let us come down to common sense. He seeks one of two things—either a real insight into human nature (he got that in "David Harum") or he seeks diversion, entertainment. A writer's style is only a part of the machinery of presentation. The main thing is that he has something to present. Even though I am a publisher I think that I know something about literary quality and literary values, and it must be owned at once that hardly one in a dozen of the very popular recent novels has any literary quality. But every one of them, nevertheless, has some very genuine and positive quality. They were not written by any trick, and their pop-

ularity does not make the road to success any easier to find. They have qualities that are rarer than the merely literary quality. Mr. Henry James's novels have what is usually called the literary quality. Yet half the publishing houses in the United States have lost money on them, while the publisher and the author of "Richard Carvel" and "The Crisis" and "The Crossing" made a handsome sum of money from these books, which have no literary style.

This does not mean a whining confession that "literature" does not pay. For my part I cannot weep because Mr. James and Mr. Howells do not find many readers for their latest books. But, while Mr. Churchill is not a great writer (since he has no style), and while few persons of the next generation of readers (whereby I mean those of year after next) are going to take the trouble to read his books, yet,

for all that, they have a quality that is very rare in this world, a quality that their imitators never seem to see. They have construction. They have action. They have substance. A series of events come to pass in a certain order, by a well-laid plan. Each book makes its appeal as a thing built, finished, shapen, if not well-proportioned, substantial. It is a real structure—not a mere pile of bricks and lumber. The bricks and lumber that went into them are not as fine nor as good as somebody else may have in his brick-yard and his lumber pile. But they are put together. A well shapen house of bad bricks is a more pleasing thing than any mere brick-pile whatever.

I recall this interesting experience of a man whose novels are now fast winning great popular favor. He sat down and wrote a story and sent it to a publisher. It was declined. He sent it to another.

Again it was declined. Then he brought it to me. (He told me of the preceding declinations a year later). I told him frankly that it lacked construction. I supposed that that was the last that I should see of him. But about a year later he came again with another manuscript and with this interesting story.

"Like a fool," said he, "I simply blazed away and wrote what I supposed was a novel. Nobody would publish it. When you said that it lacked construction, I went to work to study the construction of a novel. I analyzed twenty. I found a dozen books on the subject which gave me some help. But there are few books that do help. I constructed a sort of method of my own."

That man yet has no sense of literary values, as they are usually considered. The only good quality of his style is its perfect directness and clearness. He writes blunt, plain sentences. But every one of them tells something. He does

not bother himself about style, nor about literary quality. He fixes his mind on the story itself, to see that it has substance, form, action, proportion. And he worked out this new novel with these qualities in it.

It was a dime novel in praise of one of the cardinal Christian virtues—very earnest, very direct. But the persons in it were real. They not only said things, they did things; and many of the things they did were interesting. One of our salesmen was asked to read the manuscript. "It'll sell," said he. Our literary adviser said that it was a bald moral Sunday school play. "You could put it on the stage by cutting it here and there," he declared. "But it has no literary quality." Both were right. The book has sold well. It has amused and interested its tens of thousands.

The author's next book after that was very much better. Having learned something of the art of construction he

began to think of such a detail as style. He re-wrote the book to make it "smooth." But the point is, he first paid attention to his construction and made sure that he had a story to tell.

The enormous amount of waste work done by unsuccessful novel writers is done without taking the trouble first to make sure that they have a story to tell.

Few persons have any constructive faculty. This is the sad fact that comes home at last to a man who has read novels in manuscript for many years. A publisher comes to look for construction in a novel before he looks for style or literary quality.

This confession is enough to provoke the literary journals to condemn the publishers as mere mercenary dealers in sensational books. Yet, while a book that is well constructed may not be "literature," very few books have a serious chance to become literature unless they have good construction.

I, for one, and I know no publisher who holds a different opinion, care nothing for the judgment of the professional literary class. Their judgment of a novel, for instance, is of little value or instruction. It may be right—often it is. It may be wrong. But whether right or wrong (and there is no way that I know to determine finally whether any judgment be right or wrong) it is of no practical value. A literary judgment of a new novel cannot affect the judgment that men will form of it ten years hence. Therefore it is of no permanent value. Neither can it affect the sales of a new novel. It is therefore of no practical importance for the moment. I look upon reviews of novels as so much publicity—they have value, as they tell the public that the book is published and can be bought, and as they tell something about it which may prod the reader's curiosity. Further than this they are of no account. Not one of the three

publishers whose personal habits I know as a rule takes the trouble to read the reviews of novels of his own publishing.

Novel making, then, is an industry, and the people who make them best concern themselves very little about what is usually meant by "literary values," and very little about their popularity. The writers who deliberately set out to write novels of great popularity have almost always missed it. The industry is an art, also, but it is not an art of mere fine writing. It is chiefly an art of construction—an art of putting things in due proportion. This assumes, of course, that the novelist has things to put.

The truth is, the delicate and difficult art of finding out just what the public cares for—the public of this year or the public of ten years hence—has not been mastered by many men, whether writers or publishers. If you find out what the great public of today wants, you are

a sensationalist. If you find out what the great public of ten or twenty years hence will want, you are a maker or a publisher of literature. And the public of the future is pretty sure to want something different from the public of today.

Within six months after the publication of a popular novel the publisher of it (other publishers, too) will receive a dozen or a hundred stories that have been suggested by it. Many an author of such a manuscript will write that he has discovered the secret of the popular book's success and that he has turned it to profit in his own effort. Such letters are singularly alike. The writers of them regard success as something won by a trick, as a game of cards might be won. These remind one, too, of the advertisements of patent medicines—except that the writers of them are sincere. They believe heartily in their discovery. Thus every very popular novel gives a

great stimulus to the production of novels. "To Have and To Hold" brought cargoes of young women for colonists' wives to hundreds of amateur story writers.

But stranger than the popularity of very popular novels, or than the utter failure of merely "literary" novels, is the moderate success of a certain kind of commonplace stories. I know a woman of domestic tastes who every two years turns off a quiet story. She has now written a dozen or more. They are never advertised. But they are well printed and put forth by one of our best publishers. The "literary" world pays no heed to her. Her books are not even reviewed in the best journals. They lack distinction. But every one is sure to sell from ten to fifteen thousand copies. No amount of advertising, no amount of noise could increase the number of readers to twenty-five thousand; and there is no way to prevent a sale of from ten

to fifteen thousand copies. Why this is so is one of the most baffling problems of psychology. But it is the rule. Authors of novels are known and rated among publishers as ten thousand, or twenty-five thousand, or fifty thousand, or one hundred thousand writers. Book after book reaches a certain level of popularity and—stops. Mr. Marion Crawford, Mr. Hopkinson Smith, Miss Wilkins—all these have their more or less constant levels.

The lay world has no idea of the number of novels that fail. There are one-book authors all over the country. The publishers' hope always is that a new writer who makes a pretty good novel will do better next time. Thus the first book is accepted for the sake of the next one. The first fails, and the second is not wanted. There are dozens and dozens of such cases every year. The public doesn't know it, for the very abyss of oblivion is the place where a

dead novel falls. Nobody knows it—that is the tragedy—but the publishers and the author.

A case came to light a little while ago of a man who had years ago written novels that failed. He had been forgotten. But he took a new start. Yet he feared that his first failures would damn him with the publishers. He took another name, therefore. Not even his publishers knew who he really was. He succeeded and he concealed his identity until he died.

The publisher's loss on an unsuccessful novel may be little or big. All publishers lose much on unsuccessful ventures in fiction, chiefly on young authors who are supposed to have a future, or on old authors who have a "literary" reputation and have reached that ghostly period of real decline when they walk in dreams from one publishing house to another.

But there is generally a reason for

success or for failure. The trouble is that the reason often does not appear soon enough. The chief reason for the success of a novel is the commonplace one that it contains a story. It may be told ill or it may be told well, but there is a story. And the chief reason for failure is the lack of a story. A novel may be ever so well written,—if it have no story, the public will not care for it.

I wonder if there be any light in this very obvious discovery. Simple as it seems, it costs every publishing house a pretty penny every year to find it out; and as soon as we find it out about one writer we forget it about another! It is a great truth that does not remain discovered.

# Are Authors an Irritable Tribe?

## CHAPTER III

### ARE AUTHORS AN IRRITABLE TRIBE?

*An Emphatic Answer in the Negative—They Are Gentlemen and Ladies and Treat Their Publisher with Courtesy—Bonds of Friendship Thus Formed That Endure—Some Amusing and Nettling Exceptions—Cranks Among the Scholars—The Inconstant Author Who Is Always Changing Publishers—Why a Publishing Trust Is Impossible.*

The old and persistent notion that the writers of books are an irritable tribe, hard to deal with, and manageable only by flattery—if it was ever true, is not true now. During an experience of a good many years I have suffered a discourtesy from only two. Both these were "philosophers"—not even poets, nor novelists. They wrote books that the years have proved are dull; and,

when it became my duty to disappoint them, although I hope I did it courteously, they wrote ill-tempered letters The hundreds of other writers of all sorts that I have had the pleasure to deal with have conducted themselves as men and women of common sense, and most of them are men and women of very unusual attractiveness. I doubt whether a man of any other calling has the privilege of dealing with persons of such graciousness and of such consideration.

But the women who write require more attention than the men. Their imaginations are more easily excited by the hope of success, and few of them have had business experience. They want to be fair and appreciate frank dealing. Yet they like to have everything explained in great detail.

One woman, now one of our most successful novelists—successful both as a writer of excellent books and as an earner of a good income—was kind

enough to seek my advice about one of her early novels. It was a book that she ought not to have written; the subject was badly chosen. I frankly told her so. The whole reading world has told her so since. But naturally she did not agree with me. She took the book to another publisher. Two years passed. She had a second novel ready. This was one of the best American stories of a decade. To my great gratification I received a letter from her one day asking if I cared to read it. Of course I said yes.

Then came another telling how she had never changed her opinion of her former book—not a jot—I must understand that thoroughly. If that were clearly understood she went on to say she would like to have me publish the new book on two conditions: (1) That I should myself read it immediately and say frankly what I thought of it, and (2) that I should pay her a royalty large enough to repair her wounded feelings

about the former book. Subsequently she added another condition—

"You may publish it," she said, "if you heartily believe in the book."

Very shrewdly said—that "heartily believe in the book." For the secret of good publishing lies there. There are some books that a publisher may succeed with without believing in them—a dictionary or a slapdash novel, for examples. But a book that has any sterling quality—a real book—ought never to have the imprint of a publisher who is not really a sharer of its fortunes, a true partner with the author. For only with such a book can he do his best.

I did believe in this book. As soon as it was in type I required every man in my office who had to do with it to read it—the writer of "literary notes," the salesman and even the shipping clerk. When the author next called I introduced to her all these. They showed their enthusiasm. She was convinced. The

book succeeded in the market almost beyond her expectations. It is a good book. Everyone of us believes in it and believes in her.

She is not a crank, "but only a woman." We have our reward in her friendship and she is generous enough to think that we have done her some service. We esteem it a high privilege to be her publishers.

But God save me from another woman who has won a conspicuous success in the market. The first question she ever asked me was:

"Are you a Christian?"

"Do I look like a Jew or a Mohammedan?" I asked.

She never forgave me. Her novel had a great religious motive. It sold by the tens of thousands and most maudlin emotionalists in the land have read it. But I do not publish it. To do so, I should have had to pay the price of being "converted." Now this lady is

a crank. But it is not fair to call her books literature.

The veriest crank of all is our great scholar. It is an honor to publish the results of his scholarship (few parsnips as it butters), for the man's work is as attractive as he is odd. He thinks himself the very soul of fairness. Yet he comes at frequent intervals wishing so to change his contract as to make publishing his books an even more expensive luxury than it was before. A contract is to him a thing to make endless experiments with. When we were once driven to desperation, one of my associates suggested that we propose half a dozen unimportant changes in it, on the theory that change—any change—was all he wanted. It was an inspired suggestion. A great scholar, a restless child. But some day (we feel) he will break over all traces, and we are all afraid of him.

But very sane and sensible men and

women are most of those who succeed in winning the public favor. Some are grasping, as other men are. One, for instance, whose book had earned $7,000 in two years, demanded a prepayment of $8,000 for the next book. A compromise was made on $2,000! That was the measure of my folly, for the book is waning in its popularity and has hardly earned this prepaid royalty.

An author came to my office one day indignant because his novel was not more extensively advertised. There was the usual explanation—it would not pay. He had money to spare and he proposed to advertise it himself. He wrote the advertisements, he selected the journals in which the advertisements should appear, and he inserted them—$1,000 worth.

By some strange fate the sales of the book began just then greatly to decline. They have kept declining since, and why nobody can tell. When the public has

bought a certain number of copies of a novel—of one novel it may be 1,000 copies, of another 100,000 copies—there is nothing that can be done to make it buy another 1,000 or 100,000. It seems to know when it has enough. Take more it will not. The worst "crank" that any publisher ever encountered is not an author; it is the public, unreasoning, illogical, unconvincible, stolid!

Odd persons are found in every craft. But I think that there are fewer odd ones among successful writers than among successful lawyers, for instance. And this is what one would naturally expect, but for the traditional notion that writers are unbalanced. Who else is so well balanced as the writer of good books? He must have sanity and calmness and judgment, a sense of good proportion, an appreciation of right conduct and of all human relations, else he could not make books of good balance and proportion.

Most writers have few financial dealings, and they often innocently propose impracticable things. But this is not a peculiar trait of writers. Most preachers and many women show it. I have known a successful college president, for instance, to cut a paragraph out of a proof sheet with a pair of scissors, imagining that this would cause it to be taken out by the printers.

They are appreciative, too; and they make the most interesting friends in the world. Almost all writers of books work alone. Lawyers work with clients and with associated and opposing lawyers. Even teachers have the companionship of their pupils in the work. Men of most crafts work with their fellows, and they forget how much encouragement they owe to this fellowship. A dreary task is made light by it and monotonous labor is robbed of its weariness. But the writer works alone.

Almost the first man to be taken into

his confidence about his work is his publisher. If the publisher be appreciative and sympathetic and render a real service, how easily and firmly the writer is won. A peculiarly close friendship follows in many cases—in most cases, perhaps, certainly in most cases when the author's books are successful.

And this is why a great publishing trust, or "merger" is impossible. The successful publisher sustains a relation to the successful author that is not easily transferable. It is a personal relation. A great corporation cannot take a real publisher's place in his attitude to the authors he serves.

This is the reason, too, why the "authors' agents" seldom succeed in raising the hopes of unsuccessful writers. As soon as a writer and a publisher have come into a personal relation that is naturally profitable and pleasant, a "go-between" has no place. There is no legitimate function for him.

Writers are as constant in their relations as other men and women. As they acquire experience, they become more constant. Every one for himself works his way to this conclusion—once having an appreciative and successful publisher, it is better to hold to him. And the strong friendships that grow out of this relation are among the most precious gains to each.

One publisher said to another the other day: "I see by your announcements that one of my authors has gone to you—you are welcome."

"Yes," was the reply, "I have in almost every instance made a mistake when I have taken in a dissatisfied writer—one cannot make lasting friends with them."

Every great publishing house has been built on the strong friendships between writers and publishers. There is, in fact, no other sound basis to build on; for the publisher cannot do his highest duty to

any author whose work he does not appreciate, and with whom he is not in sympathy. Now, when a man has an appreciation of your work and sympathy for it, he wins you. This is the simplest of all psychological laws—the simplest of all laws of friendship and one of the soundest.

Those who know the personal history of the publishing houses that in recent years have failed or met embarrassments know that, in most cases, one cause of decline was the drawing apart of publishers and authors. When authors begin to regard their publishers as mere business agents, and publishers to regard authors as mere "literary men" with whom they have only business relations, the beginning of a decline has come.

I recall as one of the pleasantest days of my life the day on which I accepted a book by an author I had never before seen. So pleasant was our correspond-

ence that I took the first occasion I could to go nearly a thousand miles to see him. In his own house we talked about his literary plans, and I spent a day always to be remembered. Our friendship began then. Of course I was interested in his work—you cannot long feign an interest that you do not feel. This friendship has lasted now long enough to make it very much more secure a bond than any merely commercial service could have become.

Every publisher's experience is the same—if he be a real publisher and will long remain a real publisher. Else he would be only a printer and a salesman, and mere printers and salesmen have not often built publishing houses. For publishing houses have this distinction over most other commercial institutions —they rest on the friendship of the most interesting persons in the world, the writers of good books.

The more formal cultivation of

friendly relations such as the famous dinners that some publishers used regularly to give to writers has gone out of fashion. There are yet a few set dinners in the routine of several American publishing houses. But every true publisher knows the authors of his books—knows them as his friends; and the tradition of irritability is false. It is usually the unsuccessful who are irritable, whether they be authors or not.

# Has Publishing Become Commercialized?

## CHAPTER IV

### HAS PUBLISHING BECOME COMMERCIALIZED?

*A Charge Fairly Met and Its Truths Admitted—Many Features of the Business in Which a Low Tone Prevails—The Literary Solicitor an Abhorrent Creature—On the Whole, However, Commercial Degradation Prevails Less with Publishers Than in Many Other Callings—The Confidence Authors Have in Them Is Their Best Asset.*

Authorship and publishing—the whole business of producing contemporaneous literature—has for the moment a decided commercial squint. It would be wrong to say, as one sometimes hears it said, that it has been degraded; for it has probably not suffered as nearly a complete commercialization as the law has suffered, for instance. But that fine indifference to commercial

results which was once supposed to be characteristic of the great publishers does not exist today. Perhaps it never existed except in memoirs and literary journals! But there was a less obvious effort to make money in the days of the first successful American publishing houses than there is now.

The old publishing houses put forth schoolbooks; and many a dignified literary venture was "financed" by money made from the sale of textbooks and subscription books. But now the greater part of the money made from these two special departments is made by houses that publish nothing else. The making of schoolbooks and the making of subscription-books have been specialized, and almost separated from general publishing. Two great textbook houses have made large incomes; and they publish nothing but schoolbooks. These profits, which were once at the service of literature, are now withdrawn

from it. The "general" publisher has to make all his profits on his "general" books. The necessity is the heavier on him, therefore, to make every book pay. This is one reason why the general publisher has to watch his ledger closely.

Another reason for greater emphasis on the financial side of literary production is the enormously increased expense of conducting a general publishing house. The mere manufacture of books is perhaps a trifle cheaper than it used to be, but every other item of expense has been increased enormously within a generation. It costs more to sell books than it ever cost before. Advertising rates have been doubled or trebled, and more advertising must be done. Even a small general publishing house must spend as much as $30,000 or $50,000 a year in general advertising. There are many houses that each spend a great deal more than this every year.

The author, too, it must be remem-

bered, has become commercial. He demands and he receives a larger share of the gross receipts from his book than authors ever dreamed of receiving in the days of the old-time publisher. All the other expenses of selling books have increased. There was a time when publishing houses needed no travelling salesmen. Now every house of any importance has at least two. They go everywhere, with "dummies" and prospectuses of books long before they are ready for the market. Other items of "general expense" besides advertising and salesmen and ever-increasing rent, are the ever-growing demands of the trade for posters and circulars; correspondence grows more and more; more and more are special "window displays" required, for which the publisher pays. All the while, too, books are sold on long time. As a rule they are not paid for by many dealers till six months after they are manufactured.

All these modern commercial methods have added to the publisher's expense or risk; and for these reasons his business has become more like any other manufacturing business than it once seemed to be—perhaps more than it once was. Of course there are publishers—there always were such—who look only to their ledgers as a measure of their success. These are they who have really demoralized the profession, and the whole publishing craft has suffered by their methods.

It was once a matter of honor that one publisher should respect the relation established between another publisher and a writer, as a physician respects the relation established between another physician and a patient. Three or four of the best publishing houses still live and work by this code. And they have the respect of all the book world. Authors and readers, who do not know definitely why they hold them in esteem,

discern a high sense of honor and conduct in them. Character makes its way from any man who has it down a long line—everybody who touches a sterling character comes at last to feel it both in conduct and in product. The very best traditions of publishing are yet a part of the practice of the best American publishing houses, which are conducted by men of real character.

But there are others—others who keep "literary drummers," men who go to see popular writers and solicit books. The authors of very popular books themselves also—some of them at least—put themselves up at auction, going from publisher to publisher or threatening to go. This is demoralization and commercialization with a vengeance. But it is the sin of the authors.

As a rule, this method has not succeeded; or it has not succeeded long. There are two men in the United States who have gone about making commer-

cial calls on practically every man and woman who has ever written a successful book; and they are not well thought of by most of the writers whom they see. Every other publisher hears of their journeyings and of their "drumming." Sometimes they have secured immediate commercial results, but as a rule they have lost more than they have gained. The permanent success of every publishing house is built on the confidence and the esteem of those who write books. When a house forfeits that, it begins to lose. Its very foundations begin to become insecure.

Commercial as this generation of writers may be, almost every writer of books has an ambition to win literary esteem. They want dignity. They seek reputation on as high a level as possible. "The trouble with the whole business" (I quote from a letter from a successful novelist) "is that novel-writing has become so very common. 'Common' is

the word. It is no longer distinguished. What I want is distinction. Money I must have—some money at least; but I want also to be distinguished." That is a frank confession that almost every writer makes sooner or later.

Now, when a publishing house forfeits distinction it, too, becomes common, and loses its chance to confer a certain degree of distinction. And literary "drummers" have this effect—authors who can confer distinction shun their houses. The literary solicitor, therefore, can work only on a low level; and the houses that use him are in danger of sinking to a low level.

The truth is, it is a personal service that the publisher does for the author, almost as personal a service as the physician does for his patient or the lawyer for his client. It is not merely a commercial service. Every great publisher knows this and almost all successful authors find it out, if they do not know it at first.

The ideal relation between publisher and author requires this personal service. It even requires enthusiastic service. "Do you thoroughly believe in this book? and do you believe in me?" these are the very proper questions that every earnest writer consciously or unconsciously puts to his publisher. Even the man who writes the advertisements of books must believe in them. Else his advertisements will not ring true. The salesmen must believe what they say. The booksellers and the public will soon discover whether they believe it. They catch the note of sincerity—the public is won; the author succeeds. Or they catch the note of insincerity and the book lags.

This is the whole story of good publishing. Good books to begin with, then a personal sincerity on the part of the publisher. And there is no lasting substitute for these things.

The essential weakness in most of even

the best publishing houses of our day is the lack of personal literary help to authors by the owners of the publishing houses themselves. Almost every writer wishes to consult somebody. If they do not wish advice, they at least wish sympathy. Every book is talked over with somebody. Now, when a publishing house has a head—an owner—who will read every important manuscript, and freely and frankly talk or write about it, and can give sympathetic suggestions, that is the sort of publishing house that will win and hold the confidence of the best writers. From one point of view the publisher is a manufacturer and salesman. From another point of view he is the personal friend and sympathetic adviser of authors—a man who has a knowledge of literature and whose judgment is worth having. A publisher who lacks the ability to do this high and intimate service may indeed succeed for a time as a mere manufacturer and seller

of books; but he can add little to the best literary impulses or tendencies of his time; nor is he likely to attract the best writers.

And—in all the noisy rattle of commercialism—the writers of our own generation who are worth most on a publisher's list respond to the true publishing personality as readily as writers did before the day of commercial methods. All the changes that have come in the profession, therefore, have not after all changed its real character as it is practised on its higher levels. And this rule will hold true—that no publishing house can win and keep a place on the highest level that does not have at least one man who possesses this true publishing personality.

There is much less reason to fear the commercial degradation of many other callings than the publishers'.

A louder complaint of commercialism has been provoked by the unseemly

advertising of novels than by any other modern method of publishers. Now this is a curious and interesting thing. A man or woman writes a story (let us call it a story, though it be a mild mush of mustard, warranted to redden the faded cheeks of sickly sentimentality) which, for some reason that nobody can explain, has the same possibilities of popularity as Salvation Soap. A saponaceous publisher puts it out; he advertises it in his soapy way; people buy it—sometimes two hundred or three hundred thousand of them.

Behold! a new way has been found to write books that sell, and a new way to sell them. Hundreds of writers try the easy trick. Dozens of minor publishers see their way to fortune. But the trick cannot be imitated, and the way to fortune remains closed. It is only now and then that a novel has a big "run" by this method. The public does not see the hundreds of failures.

It sees only the occasional accidental success.

There is no science, no art, no literature in the business. It is like writing popular songs: One "rag-time" tune will make its way in a month from one end of the country to the other. A hundred tune-makers try their hands at the trick—not one of their tunes goes. The same tune-maker who "scored a success" often fails the next time. There is, I think, not a single soap-novelist who has put forth a subsequent novel of as great popularity as his "record-breaker," and several publishing houses have failed through unsuccessful efforts at the brass-band method.

This is not publishing. It is not even commercialism. It is a form of gambling. A successful advertising "dodge" makes a biscuit popular, or a whiskey, or a shoe, or a cigarette, or anything. Why not a book, then? This would be all that need be said about it but for the "liter-

ary" journals. They forthwith fall to gossiping, and keep up a chatter about "great sellers," and bewail commercialism in literature, until we all begin to believe that the whole business of book-writing and book-publishing has been degraded. Did it ever occur to you that in the "good old days" of publishing there were no magazines that retailed the commercial and personal gossip of the craft?

As nearly as I can make out the publishing houses in the United States that are conducted as dignified institutions are conducted with as little degrading commercialism as the old houses whose history has become a part of English literature, and I believe that they are conducted with more ability. Certainly not one of them has made a colossal fortune. Certainly not one of them ever failed to recognize or to encourage a high literary purpose if it were sanely directed. Every one of them every year

invests in books and authors that they know cannot yield a direct or immediate profit, and they make these investments because they feel ennobled by trying to do a service to literature.

The great difficulty is to recognize literature when it first comes in at the door, for one quality of literature is that it is not likely even to know itself. The one thing that is certain is that the critical crew and the academic faculty are sure not to recognize it at first sight. To know its royal qualities at once under strange and new garments—that is to be a great publisher, and the glory of that achievement is as great as it ever was.

# Has the Unknown Author a Chance?

## CHAPTER V

### HAS THE UNKNOWN AUTHOR A CHANCE?

*A Popular Illusion Based on "Graustark" and "David Harum" Dispelled—Publishers Blunder More Often in Welcoming Than in Rejecting Manuscripts of the "New Man"—Guess Work Enters Largely Into the Fate of a Novel—How Publishers Judge Manuscripts and How "Reading" Is Done.*

It will probably always be believed by many persons that publishing houses do not give careful attention to book manuscripts that come from strangers. The case of "David Harum" did much to fix this notion in the public mind. The manuscript was declined by three or four publishers before it was accepted by the Appletons. Its declination was an evidence of bad financial book-judg-

ment, but it is not proof that it was carelessly considered. Most publishers' readers are literary folk, pure and simple. Not one in a hundred has a good financial judgment of a manuscript. As a literary product, judged by academic standards, there was not much in "David Harum" to commend it. The publishers who rejected it acted on the readers' reports. When it went to the Appletons, somebody was shrewd enough to see that if it were shortened and put in somewhat better form, it would have a commercial value. A publishing judgment was passed on it there and not merely a conventional literary judgment.

Or, take the case of "Graustark." It was declined at least by one publisher. There is, perhaps, not a "literary" reader in the world who would have commended it in manuscript, or (for that matter) who will commend it now. It does violence to every literary canon.

But a Chicago publisher, by some divine or subterranean suggestion, saw a chance for it. Its roughest edges were hewn off with an axe, and it was put forth. There have now appeared four "Graustark" books, three of which have each sold perhaps a hundred times as many copies as Mr. Howell's latest novel will sell.

The difference between a mere literary judgment and a publishing judgment indicates the greatest weakness in the organizations of most publishing houses. The publisher himself is usually a business man. He has to concern himself with the financial work of his house—with the manufacture and the sale of books. In a great measure he relies, for his judgment of literary values, on his advisers and readers. As a rule these advisers and readers are employed men or women. They know nothing about what may be called the commercial value of books. Many of them know

nothing about the losses or the profits on the books that they have commended. They have had no experience in selling books. These facts indicate the wrong organization of most publishing houses. Yet the faithfulness that they show to aspiring authors is amazing; they plough conscientiously through thousands of manuscripts looking for the light of some possible genius, and they commend dozens of books where their employers accept a single volume.

But the publisher does acquire a sort of sixth sense about a book. He may or he may not know literary values, but he comes to have a peculiar sort of knowledge of the commercial possibilities of books. If he takes "literary readers'" judgments and does not read manuscripts himself, he will now and then let a "David Harum" pass through his hands. To avoid such mistakes every publishing house has at least two readers, and these read manuscripts in-

dependently of one another. The publisher then makes his judgment from them both, or perhaps from a third reading by a specialist, if the manuscript seem good enough to warrant a third reading.

The mistake of permitting a profitable manuscript to be rejected does not come, therefore, from inattention to the work of strangers, but from sheer fallibility of judgment. And the work of strangers is very carefully considered in every publishing house that I know anything about. Every publisher in these days is just as eager to get a new good writer on his list as any unknown writer is eager to get a publisher; and no manuscript above the grade of illiteracy is neglected.

A "first reader"—a man of all around general knowledge of books, and he ought to be a man full of hard common-sense, common-sense being worth more than technical literary knowledge—the "first reader" examines the manuscript.

If it be a shopworn piece of commonplace work, obviously hopeless, he may not read it from preface to end, but he must say in his written report whether he has read it all. Whether he condemn it or approve it, it is examined or read by another reader. If both these condemn it as hopeless, the publisher declines it without more ado.

The greater number of manuscripts that come to publishing houses are hopeless. Three-fourths of them, or more, are novels that have been written by lonely women or by men who have no successful occupation; and most of these are conscious or unconscious imitations of recent popular novels. It does not require very shrewd judgment to see that they are hopeless. But it does require time. If they are above the grade of illiteracy somebody must read a hundred pages or more to make sure that the dulness of the early chapters may not be merely a beginner's way of find-

ing his gait. And many of these manuscripts go from publishing house to publishing house. There are, I should say, a thousand hopeless novels in manuscript at all times making this weary journey.

Sometimes one comes back to the same publisher a second time, the author having perhaps not kept an accurate record of its itinerary. Sometimes it comes back a year later, somewhat changed. There is one novel-manuscript that has come to me four times within two years, every time in a somewhat different form, and twice with different titles—obviously to fool the "careless" publisher.

While very few mistakes are made or are likely to be made with these manuscripts that two readers independently declare hopeless, the class next to these require a great deal of work and care. This class includes those books by unknown writers that are not bad. One reader will say that they are worth con-

sidering. The next reader will say that they have some sort of merit. Then the publisher must go slowly. A third person must read them. If the publisher be an ideal publisher, he will read them himself. (The weakness of most American publishing houses of this generation comes just here—the publisher himself does not read many manuscripts.)

In the best publishing houses (this, I know, is the habit of three) the reports on books of this class are all read at a meeting of the firm, or (better) at a meeting of the firm and of the heads of departments. At such a meeting the judgment of a sensible man who is at the head of the sales department of a publishing house is very useful. He knows by his everyday work what sort of books the public is buying. Some of them are books that the "literary" world knows nothing about or has forgotten.

And three or four or five men, by a little discussion, can reach a clearer and

saner judgment about a book from the reports of three or four readers than the readers themselves can reach or than any one man or any two men who consider the reports could reach. There is no subject in the world about which a conference is likely to be more helpful. One man's judgment about the publishing quality of a book may easily be wrong. The judgment of two men may be wrong if they look at it from the same angle or with the same temperament. But the judgment of three, or four, or five men, if they have the facts before them and if they indulge in frank discussion, is very seldom wrong. No book on which serious work has been done ought to be rejected or accepted without the benefit of the independent reports of two or three sensible persons who have carefully read it, and without the discussions of these reports by three or four other persons of experience and judgment. And in at least three American

publishing houses every manuscript of any value or promise runs a course of hopeful consideration such as this; for the publisher wants good new books, he wants good new writers; and he wants them badly. Half a dozen popular writers will build a publishing house. It is, therefore, doubtful whether any other business is so carefully conducted with reference to its sources of supply.

In fact, all publishers make many more mistakes in accepting books than in declining them. They accept many books from new writers that they hope may possibly succeed, but in which they have not very strong faith. It is the book manuscripts of this class that cause the most work and the greatest trouble—the class that may possibly succeed. A book of this class by a new writer who shows cleverness or some other good quality is often accepted in the hope that the author may do better with the next book. It is accepted as an

encouragement and as a hope; it chiefly is for this reason that so many books are published that are barely good enough to warrant publication. The publisher is trying to "develop" an author.

Sometimes this method succeeds; for it sometimes happens that a good writer writes a first book that is merely a promise of later achievement. But this does not often happen. In most cases the second book is no better than the first—or is worse. Then the publisher loses and the writer is seldom heard of again. The number of one-novel writers scattered over the land would surprise the world if it were known. There is no rule about literary production to which there are not an embarrassing number of exceptions. But in most cases a successful writer starts with a successful book. The hope that the second book will be better is one of the rocks on which many publishing ventures wreck.

But if the publishers put forth a num-

ber of commonplace books (chiefly novels) from a false hope that they may thus develop good writers, they also do a service of the opposite kind. They save the long-suffering public from many worthless books. For if the public had thrust upon it all or half or a tenth of the books that are written, what a dull world we should have!

When a book-manuscript has been rejected, the delicate task comes next of informing the author. This task is seldom done as well as it ought to be. It is almost impossible for a publisher—who receives and rejects manuscripts as a matter of business—to put himself in the place of a writer who has spent lonely weeks in her work. To send a mere business note is almost an insult. Yet what more can the publisher write? He does not dare write hopefully. If he does he will give a degree of encouragement that is dishonest. Yet the author expects a long and explicit letter telling

why the manuscript is unavailable. If she does not receive such a letter she jumps to the conclusion that her manuscript has not had fair consideration. Publishers' letters of rejection are the chief cause, I suspect, of the persistent notion that they are careless in the examination of manuscripts.

Every letter of declination ought to be written by a skilful man—a diplomatist who can write an unpleasant truth without offence. Every such letter ought to be written with a pen. No general form ought to be used. Yet in only one of the publishing houses whose habits I know is this degree of care taken. The consideration of manuscript from strangers is careful and conscientious, but letters of rejection are often perfunctory.

To sell a novel that has the mysterious quality of popularity in it is not difficult. Properly launched, it sells itself. To sell a novel that lacks the inherent quality of popularity—that is almost impossible.

Apparently it has sometimes been done, but nobody can be sure whether the result after all was due to the book or to the salesman. Every publisher has proved, over and over again, to his disgust, that he cannot make the people buy a novel that they do not want; and when a novel appears (no better novel) that they do want, the novel-readers find it out by some free-masonry and would buy it if the publishers tried to prevent them.

Nobody has discovered a rule—to say nothing of a principle—whereby the popularity of a novel by a new writer may be determined. If it be a really great, strong book, of course it is easy to understand that it will sell; but whether it will sell 10,000 copies or 100,000 nobody knows. If it be a slap-dash dime-novel, full of action, it is easy to guess that it will sell; but whether 5,000 or 500,000 nobody knows. Sometimes a book of the sheerest commonplace hap-

pens to hit the public mood at the happy angle and sells beyond all expectation. The truth is, every new novel by an unknown writer presents a problem peculiar to itself; and in advertising it and offering it for sale, every book's peculiar problem must be studied by itself.

The whole question is a subtle social one. Who could have foretold popularity for "pigs in clover," rather than for some other silly puzzle; or for ping-pong; or for women's hats of a certain grotesque construction? The popular whim about novels is like the whims for these things. And a popular novel passes as quickly as any other fashion. The story has been many times told of the sudden falling off of the demand for "Trilby"—so sudden that the publishers had a large number of copies left on hand which could not be sold at all except as waste paper. Every publisher is afraid to publish very large editions of any very popular novel; for they have

all had an experience parallel to this experience with "Trilby."

But other kinds of books are less capricious than novels; and the business of the publisher has been reduced more nearly to a science in dealing with books of information. Several publishers, for example, have series of little books made of selections from English and American classics. Many of them have sold well; but some of them have sold by the million and others just as good and just as attractive have stopped at the ten-thousand limit or at a lower limit. The difference is with the skill with which they were put on the market. Sometimes an ingenious "scheme" will sell information books in great numbers; and it often happens that the worst of three or four books on the same subject and published for the same price, becomes far better known than the other better books.

As a theoretical proposition it seems

plain that the publisher who will spend the most money in newspaper advertising will sell the most books. Authors not infrequently take up this notion. Sometimes it is true; for sometimes newspaper advertising will cause a great demand for a book. But this is not true with every book. And most recent publishing failures have been due—in a great measure, at least—to prodigal advertising—or, perhaps, to misdirected advertising.

Every book is a problem unto itself. The wise publisher so regards it from the beginning; and he makes his plans for every book to suit its peculiar case and not another. All the long road from author to reader, the book—any book—presents a series of interesting, original problems. Many of them are very fascinating problems. They call for imagination, fertility, ingenuity. The reason why few authors or authors' societies or other persons who have not

been definitely trained to publishing fail, is that they are too likely to regard publishing as a mere routine business—a business of manufacturing a certain product and then of offering it for sale. They forget that every book—and even every edition of every book—presents a problem that was never presented before since the world was made. And when its sympathetic ingenuity and inventiveness fail, a publishing house begins to become a mere business and the drying-up period is not far off.

But no publishing house fails because it does not examine manuscripts carefully. There is no other business that I know of that is done more seriously; and the mistakes made are fewer than the public thinks. They are mistakes of judgment and not of carelessness.

The Printer Who Issues Books at the Author's Expense

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PRINTER WHO ISSUES BOOKS AT THE AUTHOR'S EXPENSE

*A Heartless Pirate Who Preys Upon the Unsophisticated and Ambitious Writer—The Contract in Which This Sort of "Publisher" Cannot Lose—The Inevitable Disappointment—How the Publication by Even a Responsible House of a Book That Sells Poorly Injures the House.*

An innocent and ambitious good woman sent to me last year a form of contract that a printer who pretended to be a publisher had sent her to sign for the publication of a novel. In its unessential clauses it was like the usual publisher's contract; but it required the author to pay in advance a fixed sum for the plates and for the manufacture of one thousand copies;

and this sum was just about twice what they should cost him. Then he was to pay her not the usual ten or even fifteen per cent. royalty, but fifty per cent. on all copies sold—as well he might; and, if at the end of a year the book had ceased to sell, she was bound to buy the plates from him at half cost. The meaning of all this translated into figures, is this: The plates would cost him $250, for he does cheap work; a thousand copies of the book would cost him $200, for he makes cheap books; total, $450. She would pay him in advance $900. He has a profit so far of $450. He does not expect to sell any of the books. Her friends would buy perhaps as many as two hundred copies. They would not be on sale at the bookstores—except in her own town. At the end of the year she would pay him again for the plates half what he charged her at first—which is just what they cost him. By this time she would have

paid just three times their cost to him. His outlay in the whole transaction would be:

| | |
|---|---|
| For plates | $250 |
| For 1000 copies | 200 |
| | $450* |
| His income would be: Her prepayment | 900 |
| Her purchase of the plates a year later | 250 |
| | 1150 |
| His profit | $700 |

He would not have even to make any outlay of capital. She supplies the capital and he makes his $700 profit by writing her a few letters. If any of the books were sold he would receive also half what they brought. She would have spent $1150, less what she received for the few copies that were sold. Her book would not have been published—only printed at an excessive cost.

There are several "publishers" who seem to do a prosperous brief business of this kind by preying upon inexpe-

*The items of expense should at present-day prices be doubled.

rienced and disappointed authors. It is only by accident they ever get a book that sells; and they hardly pretend to put books on the market, for of course the booksellers will not buy them. A really good book would, therefore, in their hands be buried. The public would never find it out. They print a large number of the novels that the real publishers decline.

The long list of books—chiefly novels—that these pseudo-publishers put out tells a sad tale of misdirected energy and of disappointed hopes. A man—oftener it is a woman—conceives the notion of writing a novel. She works alone. She shuts herself off from life about her. Any human being who spends months at a self-imposed secret task becomes profoundly, even abnormally interested in it. The story grows—or flows; for the author becomes more fluent as she goes on. She is likely to accept all the stories of extraordinary

successes that she reads in the literary journals as if they were common successes. She goes on working by herself with no corrective companionship. At last she sends it to a real publisher and gets a disappointing decision. She imagines a thousand reasons why she is not appreciated. She sends it to another, and so on. The story of the wanderings of "David Harum" in manuscript has given courage to thousands of worthless novels—a courage to travel to the last ditch, and the last ditch is the pseudo-publisher. "Yes," he writes, "it is an unusual story;" and he will be greatly honored to publish it, and sends one of his remarkable contracts.

To get the book published by anybody will bring her recognition, she thinks. The public will be kinder than the publishers. She takes the risk—sometimes goes into debt to do so. That is the end of the book, and in most cases the end of the author's career. The

work begun in loneliness has ended in oblivion—wasted days, wasted dollars, wasted hopes.

Yet what is an author to do who believes in his own work when it is refused by the regular publisher? Publish it himself or let it remain in manuscript. Never permit it to be brought out by a publisher to whom any suspicion attaches.

There is not much danger (I do not believe there is any danger) that a manuscript of any value whatever will under present conditions fail to find a legitimate purchaser. But one way out of the difficulty that authors often seek is to propose to a legitimate publisher to publish his book at the writer's expense; and it is not apparent to the layman why the publisher cannot afford to make such arrangements. "If the author pays the bill," he says, "the publisher will surely lose nothing." But the publisher does lose, and loses heavily,

every time he publishes a book that is not successful in the market. A publisher cannot afford to accept a book that will not itself earn a profit. If the author pay all the cost and a good profit besides, even this does not change the case; for unsalable books clog the market and stop the wheels of the publisher's whole trade. He soon begins to lose influence and standing in the book trade. The jobbers buy new books from him in smaller quantities. The booksellers become suspicious of his judgment.

Last year, to give a true instance, a publisher put out four new novels by four new writers. His salesmen and his advertising man announced them as good books. They made enthusiastic estimates of them. The book dealers ordered liberally. Three out of the four failed to make any appreciable success. The dealers had many copies of them left on hand. This year, when

the same publisher brought out two more new novels by two more new writers, his salesmen met with incredulity and indifference. The booksellers said to them with a sad smile, "We'll swap copies of your last year's novels for these."

Now it so happens that both of these new books of this year are good and popular. A demand for them was made as soon as the reviews appeared and people began to read them. But the booksellers were ill supplied. They would order only a few copies at a time —or none. Thus the good books of this year suffered because the publisher's dull books of last year failed to bring profit or satisfaction to anybody. They stood in the way of this year's better books.

While, therefore, no legitimate publisher wishes to reduce his business to a mere commercial basis, and while he is eager to maintain the dignity of his pro-

fession—must maintain it in fact—and do as high service as possible to the literary production of his time; yet he can not load down his list with many books that have not a good commercial reason for existence.

The plausible proposition which is so often made in these days of universal authorship—to publish books at the author's expense—is for these reasons not a sound proposition. If the book succeeds there is no reason why the author should make the investment. If it fail, the publisher loses, even though the author settle the bill; and he loses heavily.

A writer who asks a publisher to bring out a book that has no commercial reason for existence is asking him to imitate the "fake" publisher. The "fake" publisher could not make a living (since he has no character and cannot sell books) except by cash payments from his authors. As soon as the pub-

lisher begins to receive cash payments from his authors (be the basis ever so legitimate) he begins to clog up the outlets for his product. He has taken the first step towards "fake" publishing.

In a word, commercially unprofitable books may be printed, but they cannot be published without ruining the machinery that they are run through. He is the best publisher who has the largest proportion of good books on his list (whether his list be long or short) that are at the same time alive in the market.

There are—let it be said as an exception—a few classes of books that every publisher wishes to have on his list in spite of the fact that they cannot be made profitable, such as works of great scholarship or monumental works that have a lasting value. It is legitimate that the writers or the societies or organizations under whose directions such books were written should pay or share

the cost of their manufacture. But few such works yield a profit at last to either publisher or author. And they are not made to clog the book market. They are sold only to special classes of readers.

A book is a commodity. Yet the moment it is treated as a mere commodity it takes severe revenge on its author and on its publisher.

These pseudo-publishers sometimes solicit manuscripts from ignorant writers. They have veiled advertisements in the literary journals. Ignorance and ambition is a susceptible combination. Several years ago one of these plausible swindlers bribed a reader in one of the larger publishing houses to report to him the names of all the writers whose novels were declined there. The fakir then plied them with circulars and letters.

While I have been writing about publishing swindles I have been reminded of the accusation brought several years

ago against publishers—especially English publishers—that the temptation to fraud was too strong to be resisted by any but the most upright and successful men. An author gives his book to his publisher. Twice a year the publisher makes a report—pays royalties on the number of books that he has reported as sold. There is no way whereby the author can verify the publisher's reports. He has to take his word for it. Even if the author or someone who acted for him were to see the publisher's books, he could learn nothing, for the publisher's bookkeeping is a very complicated thing; and reports of book sales could easily be "doctored."

The chance for fraud does exist. But the first wish of every normal man in the business, even if he lacks vigorous honesty, is to make his reports of sales to his author as large as possible. This wish is too strong to be overcome by anything less than the most hopeless

moral depravity. A publisher who should commit the crime of making false reports to his authors would be a monstrosity. Yet the contention that Sir Walter Besant made in England for so many years, that the publishing business was conducted without such checks and verifications as are applied to other business transactions was true; and I, for one, see no practical remedy for it.*

Moral: Select your publisher with care; make sure that he is honest (by far most of us are); then trust him. But steer clear of all "fake" publishers and "agents."

*Since Mr. Page wrote his "Confession," it has become the custom of high-class publishing houses to have royalty reports to authors examined and certified by expert chartered accountants.

# The Advertising of Books Still Experimental

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ADVERTISING OF BOOKS STILL EXPERIMENTAL

*Publishers Are Uncertain as to the Amount of Sales Made in That Way—How the Book Business Differs from the Shoe Trade, for Example —The Problem of How to Get the Books Before the People Is at the Root of All Other Book Trade Questions—Why the Book Canvasser Is Still Necessary—A Vast Field Waiting for Development.*

About the advertising of books, nobody knows anything. The most that can be said is that some publishers are making very interesting experiments. But nobody has yet worked out a single general principle that is of great value. The publishers themselves frankly confess that they do not know how to advertise books—except a few publishers who have had little experience.

The fundamental difficulty of course is that hardly any two books present the same problem. Find a successful advertising plan for one book—it will not be a good plan for another. This fundamental difficulty marks the difference, for instance, between books and shoes. When a shoe merchant finds out by experiment how to describe his shoes and in what periodicals to print his description, his problem is solved. Recently several publishers discovered a successful way to advertise a novel. They tried the same plan with another novel and another. But it's hit or miss. I, for one, would give much to know how often it has been "miss."

The old-fashioned way was to insert a brief, simple, dignified announcement of every book, as is still done in The Spectator, of London, for example. Good; but such an announcement doesn't go far. A very few thousand persons see it. They wait until the

books are reviewed or till some friend or authority speaks about them. For this perfectly good reason some publishers do not insert many advertisements in those publications that go only to the literary class—they are to a degree superfluous. Those that are inserted are inserted to give the publishers and the books a certain "standing," and to keep pleasant the relations between the publishers and these journals.

Then come, of course, the monthly popular magazines. They reach a very much wider class of readers, and to advertise books in them is a logical procedure. But their advertising rates are almost prohibitory. The margin of profit on books is very small. There is not money enough in the business to warrant extensive and expensive magazine advertising. The result is the publishers put their announcements of perhaps a dozen new books on a single advertising page of the magazines, and

they cannot, in this restricted space, say enough about any particular book to make the advertisement effective.

Then there are the daily papers. One or two of the best dailies in every large city are used by the publishers for announcements of new books. They cannot afford more—except in the case of those novels which may reach enormous editions. Given a novel that will sell 100,000 copies or more, and you have enough possible profit to warrant a good deal of advertising. But during this calendar year only two novels (perhaps three) have new editions of more than 100,000 copies. What is a publisher to do, then, who has a novel that will sell 10,000 copies, or 20,000 copies and no more? Can he make it sell 50,000 or 100,000 by spending a large sum in advertising it? Perhaps, once in ten times, or once in twenty times; but not oftener.

Five or six publishing houses spend

more than $50,000 a year, each, in advertising.* Two spend a good deal more than this sum; and one is reported as saying that he spends $250,000. These are not large sums when compared with the sums spent for advertising other wares. But an advertisement of a shoe published to-day will help to sell that shoe next year. The shoemaker gets a cumulative effect. But your novel advertised to-day will be dead next year. You get no cumulative effect. When I say, therefore, that no publisher has mastered the art of advertising books, I tell the literal truth. They all run against a dead wall; and they will all tell you so in frank moments.

The study of the problem of advertising books takes one far afield. What quality in a book makes it popular anyhow? Even if you are wise enough to know that (and you are very wise if you do know that) the question arises whether advertising is necessary. There

*The outlay for advertising has increased greatly in recent years.

have been as many popular books sold in large editions without advertising as with it. If your book is really popular it may sell anyhow. I could make a long list of such books, and a still longer list of books that extensive advertising did not sell—books which seemed to their publishers to have the quality of great popularity.

The question carries us further back still. Let us take the analogy of the shoemaker again. He has shoe stores within reach of the whole population. There is not a village in the land where there is not a store in which shoes are sold. The manufacturers' salesmen find this distributing machinery ready to their hands. If a man in Arkansas or in Montana or in Florida wants a pair of shoes, he is within reach of a place where he may buy them. Not so with books. There are few bookstores. Two or three per cent. of the population (perhaps less) live within convenient reach

of bookshops. True, a book may be ordered by mail. But so may a pair of shoes. But this is not a good substitute for a store, where a man may see the book. The mail-order business will always be secondary to direct sales. But, since bookstores are so few, the book-distributing machinery is wholly inadequate. The publisher has no effective way yet to reach his normal public with his wares.

There is nobody to blame, perhaps. Surely, it would not be a profitable undertaking for any man or woman to buy a stock of books and to open a store in a small town. What is the remedy, then?

The simple truth is, here is one of the problems of distribution that have not yet been solved. There are throughout the land another one hundred thousand persons who would buy any novel of which one hundred thousand have been sold, if they could see the book and hear

about it—if it were intelligently kept for sale where they would see it. This is a self-evident proposition. But nobody has yet found a way thus to distribute a book. And (this is the point) until better distributing machinery is organized, it will not pay publishers to advertise with as prodigal a hand as shoemakers and soapmakers use in making their wares known.

It is this lack of proper distributing machinery that has made possible the career of the book-agent. There are no shoe peddlers. Almost all the publishing houses—all the important houses—employ book peddlers. The business is generally regarded as a—nuisance, to say the most for it. But, from the publisher's point of view, it is a necessity. And this is the crude way whereby it is sought to remedy the radical deficiency of proper distributing machinery. Of course, the book-agent method has its obvious disadvantages. It is not a dig-

nified occupation, as most agents practise it. The most dignified members of the community, therefore, do not take it up. In every case it is not even the trustworthy members of the community that take it up. Again, the agent must be paid; and this is a very costly method (to the purchaser) of buying books. The purchaser pays half his money for the books; the other half for being persuaded to buy them.

And (to take a broad, economic view of the subject) the book peddler surely cannot be considered the final solution of the problem of a proper distribution of books. At some time in the future, when the country is three or four times as densely settled as it now is, there will be book stores in all towns. There may still be need for the persuasiveness of the agent, for some of the most successful of them now do their best work in cities within sight of good book shops. But the point is, few book-agents sell

new books, and few of them sell single books: they usually sell books in sets. The problem, therefore, of the proper distribution of the four or five really good books that my publishing house has put out this fall still remains unsolved and, though I advertised them in all magazines and newspapers, I should not effectively reach the attention of one-fifth or one-tenth of the possible buyers of them. I should simply spend in advertising the profit that I may make on the copies that I sell with a reasonable publicity through the regular channels. I do insert advertisements of them for three or four reasons—with the hope of helping their sales; to keep the public informed of the activity of our publishing house; to please the press; and—to please the authors of the books. But I know very well that I am working (as every publisher is working) in a business that has not yet been developed, that is behind the economic organization

of other kinds of manufacturing and selling, that awaits proper organization.

Figure it out yourself. Here is a book of which eighty thousand copies have been sold through "the trade;" that is, through the book stores. Our salesmen have visited every important bookseller from Portland, Me., to Portland, Ore., and from Duluth to New Orleans. We have spent quite a handsome sum in advertising it. Four-fifths of these eighty thousand copies were sold in a few months after its publication. The booksellers said that they could sell many more if we would advertise it more. We did so. By this time our salesmen were making another trip. No, they would not buy more, thank you; it is a little slow now. The second effort at advertising did not cause it to "move" in the market. The demand is slow yet. In other words, the demand for it that could be supplied by the existing book stores was practi-

cally exhausted. Our second advertising effort was a waste of money. We have frankly to confess that we do not know how to sell more copies of this book until the time comes when it may be put into a "set" and sold by book agents. This is the same as to say that, the few existing book stores utilized, there is no organized machinery for finding more buyers except the book agent.

Yet it is obvious that a wholesome book (as this is) which eighty thousand persons have bought would please eighty thousand other persons of like minds and taste if we had any way to find these second eighty thousand persons. They exist, of course. But they live out of easy reach of the book stores. The book agents will find them several years hence.

I have (I think) shown why there can never be a publishers' trust, or "combine," because the relation of the publisher and the author is a personal rela-

tion as intimate and personal as the relation of a physician to his patient or of a lawyer and his client. But, after a book has been sold and has become a commodity, the problem is a different one. The booksellers have perceived this; and they have made ineffective efforts to "combine." They have failed because they have not made plans to widen the existing market. An organization of those that exist is not enough. The real problem is to extend their area, to find book-buyers whom they do not now reach.

Perhaps all this is very dull—this trade talk. But a publisher who is worthy of his calling regards himself as an educator of the public; and he has trade reasons and higher reasons as well for wishing to reach as many buyers of his good books as he possibly can. He knows (and you know, if you know the American people) that the masses even of intelligent folk have yet hardly fairly

begun to buy books. Go where you will among the people and you will find few books—pitifully few. We are just coming into a period when book-buying is even beginning to become general. The publishers of a generation hence will sell perhaps ten times as many good books as are sold now—surely, if they find in their day distributing machinery even half adequate.

The Story of a Book from Author to Reader

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE STORY OF A BOOK FROM AUTHOR TO READER

*The Divers Problems Which Constantly Arise—Every Step of the Way Beset with Expense, So That the Publisher Is Amazed When He Finds a Surplus—Why Books of Large Sale Are Hard to Get—The Publisher as Anxious as the Public to Print Better Books.*

The wonder is (and in my mind it grows every year) how the publishers of books make enough money to keep their shops going. When I look at my own ledgers (ledger, by the way, is become a mere literary word, for we now all keep accounts on cards and not in books)—whenever I look at my own cards and see a profit, I am astonished as much as I am gratified. Every other publisher in

America, if he have a normal and simple mind such as fits the calling, has the same emotion. Let me say, lest I appear "simple" in another sense, that our cards have, miraculously enough, generally shown very satisfactory profits, but the astonishment never becomes less.

See what a long series of processes, or adventures, if you will, a book must go through between the writer and the reader; every step costs money; and the utmost possible profit is small. Suppose it be a novel. "Book" means "novel" these days in "literary" circles and journals. Heaven bless our shallow gabble called "reviews." A novel comes to the publisher in fairly good English. The English doubtless is the author's, but the punctuation and capitals are the "typewriter-lady's" own. It must be read by one person; and, if that person's report have a ray of hope, it must be read by another; perhaps by a third.

These "readers" cost money—alas! too little money. They are generally literary persons who have failed, and there is something pathetic about their occupation. Then, after two or three readers have reported on it, I have to read it—in our particular shop, in any shop, somebody "higher up" must read it—especially if it come from a new writer.

Then we have to correspond with the author or have interviews with h—er. All this takes time, and the cost of this service rolls up. Somebody must next go over the manuscript to prepare it for the printer—to make sure that the heroine's name is spelt the same way all through and so forth and so forth. With the processes of manufacture I need not weary you. Only I must say that a bad manuscript can be put into legible type, and that type cast into solid metal blocks ready for the press with a rapidity and cheapness that rank among the mechanical wonders of the world.

By this time the artist has appeared, if the novel is to be illustrated. Book salesmen will tell you that pictures help to sell novels, and they ought to know. But I venture to say that you haven't seen three new novels in ten years whose illustrations conveyed anything but confusion to your mind. The conventional illustration of the conventional novel marks the lowest degradation of the present-day publisher. We confess by these things that we are without character or conviction. But the artist has the benefit of the commercial doubt on his side. He has also the vanity of the author. And he gets his fee—200, 300 or 500 good dollars or more—and the publisher pays the bill. Another artist makes a design for the cover.

Paper, printing, binding—all these are commonplaces, worthy of mention here only because they roll up the cost. But there are other steps in the book's journey that the public knows less

about. For instance, as soon as the first chapter has been put into type and a cover made, "dummies" of the book are got ready. A "dummy" of a book is a sort of model, or sample, of it. The cover is the cover that will appear on the finished novel; the titlepage is the novel's titlepage; and the first chapter is as it will be when the book is published. But the rest is blank paper. This "dummy" shows the physical size and appearance of the book.

The travelling salesmen take these dummies and begin their work. They go to all the jobbers and book dealers, explaining to them the charming qualities of this newly discovered novelist, and taking orders for the books. By the time they come home and their advance orders are added up, the book is ready to go to press; and the publisher knows what his "first sale" will be. Meantime (not to lose the thread of my story) all this travelling and soliciting of orders

have cost a good deal of money. The public has not yet seen a copy of the book nor even so much as heard of it nor of the "talented young author."

But now the machinery for publicity is put in action. Sly little literary notes about the book and the author begin to appear in the newspapers. These, too, have come from the publisher. From whom else, pray, could they come? But they mean that the publisher has to maintain a literary bureau. The man who writes these news notes and the advertisements of the book and other things about it is a man of skill, if he do his work well; and he, too, costs the publisher a good salary. When he begins to put forth advertising—how much shall he spend on this new novel by an unknown writer? How much shall you risk at Monte Carlo? Your upright man will risk nothing at Monte Carlo. I have sometimes thought that your upright publisher, if there be one, would risk

nothing in advertising a new book by an unknown writer, until the book began itself to show some vitality in the market.

But—to go back—as soon as the book is ready, review copies, of course, are sent to the newspapers and the literary journals (to appear a little later in the second-hand book-shops for sale at reduced prices.) All this activity requires clerks, typewriters, bookkeepers, postage-money—a large office, in fact. There are many posters, circulars—there is as much machinery required to sell a book as to sell a piano or an automobile.

From the starting-point, where the book was an ill-written manuscript, to the delivery of it to the bookseller, the publisher has less than 50 cents a copy to pay for this whole journey and to save something for profit if he can. Therefore I say that publishers who do succeed are among the most astute managers of industry.

Lest I seem to "boast rather than to confess," I come back to the starting-point, which was this—that the publishers' calling is not a very profitable one; not a profitable one at all except in fair weather and with a good skipper.

The truth is, publishing is too important a profession and our publishing houses are too important as institutions to be at the mercy of present conditions. The making of schoolbooks and the vending of standard old books in sets, which are useful vocations, but are not publishing proper, are now done best by firms and companies that do nothing else. Hence publishing proper—the bringing out of new books—must find a safer basis than the present conventional profit. It will find this safer basis in two ways.

The first and obvious way is to secure books that have an enormous popularity. This is the effort of nearly all the publishing houses to-day. If a novel

reach an edition of 100,000 copies, there is a good profit in it as matters now stand. And a novel, or other book, that will be bought by 100,000 persons ought not to be sold for more than such books now fetch. But there are not enough such books to go around; and the least worthy publishing house is as likely to secure them as the most worthy. A permanent institution, therefore, cannot be built on these or on the hope of them. They are the accidents of the calling.

The other way to maintain a worthy publishing institution is to publish worthy books, to manufacture them well, to do every piece of work that is done on them or that is done for them in the most conscientious way—to keep bookmaking as a fine art, to keep bookselling a dignified profession, to keep the selection of books to publish on the high level of scholarly judgment. This done, a publisher may set his prices higher—must set his prices higher, for he does a

higher and more costly service to society. Excellent and worthy of all praise as is some of the publishing work of this sort that is now done, a beginning has hardly yet been made. There is a demand, or a dormant demand can be awakened, for books that have merit (I mean new books as well as old) of better manufacture than we now often see. They must be sold for higher prices, of course.

This is the same as to say that just as a three-dollar shoe is made for most feet that tread this weary continent, but a five-dollar shoe is made for an increasing number of feet that prefer ease to economy, so we are becoming rich enough and wise enough to pay two dollars, or three dollars, or five dollars for a good new book that shall have large and beautiful type, good paper, good margins, good binding—shall be a work of art in its manufacture as well as in the quality of its contents. The public gets its good

books too cheap; and the reason is plain.

It was only the other day that the publishers discovered the possibility of securing book after book that would run into large editions. A novel-reading democracy—a public-school democracy—is a new thing. It is an impressive thing. It made new and big markets, and we all rushed after it. Cheapness and great editions became the rage. Writers wrote for the million; publishers published for the million. Cheap books became the fashion. All very well—this widespread effort, this universal reading. But it has not radically changed human nature nor even the permanent foundations of the profession of publishing. We shall come back to higher and better work—some of us will, at least.

Bring the subject home to yourself. What do you want for your book money? Not the latest "big seller." You may buy that to entertain you on a

railway journey. But if you bring it home at all, you send it away at Christmas to some country library. What you want in your own library for your book-money are good books, made at least as well as the furniture in the room; and you want the new books of permanent value. You are sometimes disgusted when you look over the publishers' catalogues to find so few books of this kind.

Your publishers, too, are becoming weary of having such catalogues; and as soon as we rediscover the old truth that there is a permanent demand for just the kind of books that you want, we shall turn to a more generous encouragement of them. Men who might do better work will then cease trying to write "best sellers." But you must pay the price. Since you have become accustomed to buy new books at $1.50 a volume, you are somewhat reluctant to pay $2 or $4 for a new book.* You must break yourself of that habit. In a word,

*Even Mr. Page, farsighted as he was, would be surprised at the large sales of books bringing prices that were regarded as extraordinary in his lifetime.

you must become at least as generous to your publisher as you are to your shoemaker; and then the change will take place.

By a similar course of reasoning (and it is sound) you may discover that you are yourself to blame for what our writers write and our publishers publish—in a measure at least; and, whenever you want better books, better books will be ready for you. For the publisher and even the author are but human after all; and in the mood that has possessed us all for a decade or two—since presses and paper became so cheap—we have perhaps worshipped mere numbers. I have published some books only because thousands and thousands of persons would read them. You have read them simply because thousands of other people were reading them and for no better reason. Perhaps our sins have not been heinous. But, if you are so stubbornly virtuous as to cry shame at me, I prom-

ise you this: I will reform on the day that you yourself reform; but you must first signify repentance. For you—the public—are after all our masters.

# The Limits of the Book Market

## CHAPTER IX

### THE LIMITS OF THE BOOK MARKET

*In Spite of the Many Books Issued and the Many "Large Sellers," the People Are Very Poorly Equipped with Good Books—Circulating Libraries and the Sale of Books—Many Neglected Subjects on Which Successful Books Could be Written—The Lack of Good Writers the Main Source of Poor Sale of Books.*

How large the book market is, nobody knows. Still less does anybody know how large it may become, say, in another decade of our present prosperity and spread of intelligence. Beyond any doubt more books are bought in the United States than in any other country. Yet it is a constant surprise to discover how ill supplied the mass of the people are with good books. But the

enormous increase of the market in recent years gives hope of a still greater increase to come. The number of books published every year in the United States and in the United Kingdom is about the same, but more American than English books run to large editions.

Leaving out fiction, which is the spectacular and sensational part of publishing, books of reference, of standard literature, of history, of applied science and even of poetry are sold in constantly increasing quantities. The public hears little of these because the literary journals pay little attention to them. There is, for instance, one publisher of subscription books who now adds few books to his list of which he does not expect to sell 100,000 copies. He has agents in every part of the United States, and they probably sell more books in a year than all the publishing houses in the United States put together sold thirty years ago—excluding textbooks, of

course. Last year a literary man went to a remote railway station, 1,000 miles from Boston or New York, to shoot quail. One day he saw men unloading boxes of books from a freight car on the side track. The wonder was that there should be even a freight car in that corner of the woods; and that the freight car should be filled with books was simply incredible. But there were wagon loads of Thackerays, of Dickenses, of Eliots, and even of sets of the poets, fairly well-printed, fairly well-bound volumes which had been sold to the country folk for miles around. Perhaps there has been more money spent for encyclopædias and dictionaries than Noah Webster could compute, these last ten years. The book market, therefore, is very much bigger than persons who live outside the book selling world are likely to think.

Still, relatively it is small. The largest retail book store in the country is a de-

partment store in New York or Philadelphia; but the book department is not considered one of the important parts of the store. The much-abused department store, by the way, has done much to bring a new class of persons to acquire the book-buying habit. It has made books common merchandise for the first time. Since the "Century Dictionary," to take a definite example, was thus made common merchandise, the sets of it that have been sold are incomparably more than were ever sold in any other way. Yet how small the book market yet is, is shown by this fact—that a novel of which one hundred thousand copies are sold reaches only one person in every eight thousand of the population.

Do circulating libraries lessen book sales? Yes, I dare say they do. But you will find that the publishers do not complain of them. They are disposed to accept the comforting doctrine that everything which encourages the reading of

books in the end helps the sale of them. In the end—yes. But for the moment probably no.

One man will tell you that he used regularly to buy a novel a week—sometimes two novels. He was a pretty good customer of the publishers; for fifty-two novels a year is about as many as the most avaricious publisher could reasonably expect one man to buy. But now he says he does not buy three a year. A circulating library will for $5 bring him all he wants. The publishers have, therefore, lost him as a good customer. On the other hand it is a working theory that every subscriber to a circulating library who reads a novel and talks about it at the woman's club may induce somebody to buy a copy who otherwise would never have heard of it. At any rate, the total number of novels, or of books of other sorts, now sold is not less than the number that was sold before the libraries found subscribers. The

discussion is, after all, a vain one. The publisher and the author must do the best they can by the help of the libraries or in spite of them.

Yet I am sure that the great widening of the market for which we are all looking will be found, when it is found, not by any special machinery or mechanical device; but the person who will really find it—or make it—will be a great writer. Whenever books are written that are interesting enough to compel the attention of the whole people, the poorest publishing house can sell them. The secret of success, after all, is the secret of writing books that touch masses of men deeply and directly. We have much to learn from the careers of such books as "Progress and Poverty" and "Looking Backward." They reached their great sale not by the ingenuity of their publishers, nor by their literary merit, but only because they carried messages to many minds. How-

ever delusive these messages may be, they were sincere. The truth is that the publisher (exalt him as I am trying my best to do) is, after all, only a piece of machinery. The real force that makes itself felt in the world that has to do with books is the initial force of the men and women who write. Whenever a great mind, or a great sympathy, be found which puts forth an appeal or a hope in the form of a book that has the power to touch those emotions or aspirations that all men have in common—then the trick's done. The mechanical plans that we make have power to carry only as far as the book has strength to go. If I had five great living writers on my list, my publishing task would be easy.

For the broadening of the book market, then, what we need is writers—writers of the proper quality. Of novels, we have enough and to spare, such as they are. But not of good books

of other sorts. Let us take a hint from the novel writers. Twenty years ago or less the American public was amusing itself with novels written by English writers. But about that time came those story tellers, a whole army of them, who began to write about life in different parts of our own country. Of New England, Miss Jewett and Miss Wilkins and Mrs. Austin and many more; in the Middle West, Mr. Garland, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Tarkington and half a hundred more; in New York, the author of "David Harum," Mr. Frederick, Mr. Bacheller and others; of the South, Mr. Page, Miss Johnston, Miss Glasgow and more; and there are California stories in profusion. In other words, an army of men and women began about the same time to write stories of local history and manners.

Now there are other subjects that need to be written of just as much. One such subject is science. The world is

flooded with popular books about science, but nearly all of them fail either in being accurate or in being popular. There is a better opportunity now than there ever was before for a man who really knows the most recent and scientific achievements, and who can write in the language of the people. To many people, "authoritative books" are dry books, but this is not what I mean. Such books as I have in mind can be written only by men of the best scientific equipment, but they can be written only by men who have also a great deal of literary skill.

Another great subject about which good books are needed is—you may not believe this—American history. Our political history has got itself pretty voluminously written, and there is no lack of slapdash books in distant imitation of Green's "Short History of the English People." But most of these have been prepared out of newspaper

files by men who would not take their task seriously or who were not well prepared either in matured knowledge or in literary skill to produce them. Then, too, geographically considered, the history of less than one-fourth of our territory has not yet been written. Southern history, for example, is utterly unknown.

It would be easy to name a half-dozen other great subjects which writers who now bring their manuscripts to the publishing houses are neglecting. If, therefore, men and women who have the literary gift, even to a reasonable degree, and who have literary ambition, would frankly seek those two or three publishers who are real publishers and would prove their ability to do serious work of this sort they would be almost sure to find satisfactory careers before them. Of course, one disadvantage of such work is that during its early stages no very large financial returns can be ex-

pected. But if the work were done well enough it would pay in the end—pay more money by far than a professorship in science or in history or in literature pays.

All this leads me to this general remark—that the writing public does not take the trouble to find out who the real publishers are. There is a lack of coöperation between publishers and writers in what may be called the formative period of the writer's lives. A man who writes a book sends it to some publishing house that is chosen by accident or by personal acquaintance or by whim. The public seems to think that one publishing house is as good as another. If a writer's first volume in this way falls into the hands of a publisher who does not make the acquaintance of the writer, or who cannot make an appraisal of his ability and promise, and who does not understand him, then the writer, after an initial failure, of course, becomes dis-

couraged. On the other hand, all the publishers are so eager to get books that they accept work which is not properly done, and on their part fail to put themselves into such a relation to young authors as would help them to their normal development.

If a man or woman, therefore, proposes to enter upon a literary career his first duty is to make the acquaintance of a real publisher, to be as frank with him as one must be with one's physician or one's lawyer. If two such men work together seriously and without too great haste the best results will be achieved for both, and the best results are not likely to come in any other way.

If you start, then, to gossip intelligently about the book market or about anything else with which a publisher has to do, and if you gossip long enough, you will come back to the starting point of the whole matter. What do we do or can we do to encourage the writing of

good books? And now we've run on a subject as deep as a well and as wide as a door. In the multitude of counsellors about it there is confusion. In the only other "confession" that is to follow this I shall try to show how ignorant and mistaken all those are who differ with me about this fundamental subject.

Plain Words to Authors and Publishers

## CHAPTER X

### PLAIN WORDS TO AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS

*It Pays the Author to Be Honest and Frank with His Publisher, Who Is, After All, His Best Friend—Some Recent Instances of a Discouraging Sort—The Need of Greater Dignity and Statesmanship Among Publishers—The Obligation of Ministering to the Higher Impulses of the People.*

I am flattered by hearing that a prominent publishing house wishes to print these rambling "confessions" in a pamphlet, to send to persons who write books; "for," says this house, "they tell some plain facts that authors ought to know." I hope so; and, for my part, I am not averse to publishers knowing them either. For instance, the wretched smallness of one sinner among the pub-

lishers came to light to-day. Here is the unpleasant story:

A year and a half ago I published the first novel by a young author. He is a promising writer and his story was a good one. We sold it in fairly satisfactory numbers. We advertised it, "exploited" it—did the best we could. We invited the author to come and see us. We took him into our confidence. We have regarded him as our partner, so far as his book is concerned. We have had a continuous correspondence. We have exchanged visits a time or two. He paid me the compliment to ask my advice about his next story. We have become good friends, you see; and we are as helpful to each other as we know how to be. Now his second novel is finished. In a letter that came from him to-day he informed me that another publishing house (I have a great mind to write the name of it here) has made him a very handsome offer of serial pub-

lication, provided, of course, that they may also publish the book!

Now, if the young author wishes to go browsing in these new pastures, I have no power or wish to prevent him. I cannot serve him—or do not care to serve him—if he is unwilling that I should. But I was nevertheless very grateful when he wrote, "Of course, I prefer you. I hope you have never thought me unloyal."

If publishing his first book had been a mere job done under contract, a commercial job and nothing more—that would have been one thing. But that's not publishing. What I did was to give the man the unstinted service of our house, as publishers, as advisers, as friends. We print and advertise and sell his books—yes, to the very best of our ability. But we do more. We try to make friends for his book and for him throughout the reading world. We all take a personal interest in him and in

his future. We invest our money, our good will, our work, our experience, our advice, our enthusiasm in him and in his future. This service (except the investment of money) is not a matter of contract. It is a personal, friendly service. If the service had not been successful, he would have had a perfect right to come and say that he feared that we did not serve him well and to go away from us. That would have been frank and honorable. Even, since we did succeed and have become friends, he could still go to another publisher. Yet, I maintain, if he had, he would have shown himself a man of blunt appreciation and dull honor. And the publisher who tried to win him away did a trick unworthy of the profession.

This is my last story about a publisher; and the moral is plain, alike to publisher and to author.

And now I will tell my last story

about an author, the moral of which also is plain:

There is an author for whom we have published two books, and they have been uncommonly successful. A little while ago he finished his third book. He wrote that many publishers had solicited it, that he had had several handsome offers, that he needed a large sum of money. Would we make a big advance payment? He disliked to mention the subject, but business was business after all. Now I had been at that man's service for several years. Day and night, he had sought my advice.

Well, we were cajoled into making a big advance payment—about half as big as he first asked for; and the contract was signed. Two days later, I met another publisher under conditions which invited free and friendly talk; and I told him this story. The publisher smiled and declared that that author had approached him and asked

how much he would give for this very book!

Men and brethren, we live in a commercial age. I suspect that, if we knew history well enough, we should discover that all ages have been commercial, and that all our predecessors had experiences like these. For ungrateful men have written books for many a century, I have no doubt; and we know that Barabbas was a publisher. But let us lift an honorable calling to an honorable level. Hence these frank "confessions." And, if any publisher wishes to reprint them to send to authors, or any author to send to publishers, they both have my permission. For dignity and honor thrive best in an atmosphere of perfect frankness.

Thinking over the behavior of authors and publishers to one another, I am obliged to confess that, while the peanut methods that I have just described are not common enough to cause us to

despair, the truth is that the whole business is yet somewhat unworthily conducted. I mean that it is conducted on too low a plane. For what is it that we are engaged in?

The writers of good books are among the greatest benefactors of society; and the publishers of good books, if publishing be worthily regarded and properly done, is a necessary and complimentary service. The publisher is the partner, the helper of the author and his high servant or minister to the people. It is work worthy of large men and of high-minded men. Honest men we are—those of us who conduct the publishing houses that are in good repute. But I sometimes think that we miss being large men; for we do not do our business in (shall I say?) a statesmanlike way. We imitate the manners of tradesmen. We speak in the vocabulary of tradesmen. We are too likely to look at small projects as important—to pay

our heed to the mere tricks of our trade —and to treat large enterprises, if we have them, as if they were but a part of the routine. A good book is a Big Thing, a thing to be thankful to heaven for. It is a great day for any of us when we can put our imprint on it. Here is a chance for reverence, for something like consecration. And the man or the woman who can write a good book is a form of capital infinitely more attractive than a large bank account or a great publishing "plant." Yet, if we regard an author simply as "capital," we are not worthy to serve him. The relation leads naturally to a friendly and helpful attitude. We know something about books, about the book-market, about the public, that no author is likely to know. With this knowledge we can serve those that write. And with our knowledge of the author and of his work, we can serve the public. It is our habit to keep our accounts with authors ac-

curately, to pay them promptly, to receive them courteously when they call, to answer their letters politely and sometimes to bore them with formal dinners at our clubs, before they sail for Europe. But how many of us really know the intellectual life of any author whose books we print and supply a stimulus to his best plans?

And the authors? How little they know about us or about publishing! They seem to select publishers by whims and not often by knowledge. I know a writer of good books who is at this moment seeking his third publisher. One of the others failed. The other displeased him. And now he is thinking of giving his next book to a third publisher who also will fail within five years, or I am no prophet. Yet I am hindered by courtesy from telling him so. Why the man has not by this time found a personality among the publishers who has a soundly constructed busi-

ness and at the same time a helpful intellectual appreciation of his work, I cannot understand. He, too, is looking at a great matter in a small way.

Therefore I am led to write down these rules for an author to follow when he looks for a publisher:

Find out whether the publishing house that you have in mind be financially sound. The commercial agencies will tell you, or will tell any commercial friend who may make inquiry for you. And find out who the real owners of the house are.

Then find out who conducts it. If it is conducted by a lot of hired "literary" men, avoid it. They are, most of them, men who have failed at authorship; they "read" and "advise" for salaries; and most of them know nothing about the houses that they serve. They are not principals, but (as Henry George once called them) "literary operatives." I mean to say nothing harsh about a

well-meaning, hard-working class of men. But if you have a good book, you wish to find not a "literary operative," but a real publisher.

Having found a real publisher, you will expect him to read your book himself. I am assuming that you have an important book. When he has read it, he will talk to you about it frankly. When I say frankly, I mean frankly. If he is himself a real man and knows men and books, he will not retail hack literary phrases to you. He will talk good English and good sense straight out of his intelligence to your intelligence, with no nonsense such as reviewers write in the "literary" magazines. He will become your intellectual friend.

Having found such a man, give him your book and leave him to work out the details of publishing. He will be proud to serve you. You will discover as your acquaintance ripens, that he has your whole career as a writer in his mind

and plans. He will shape his whole publishing activities to your development and to the development of other writers like you.

Then—if you are capable of writing great books—you will discover that you have set only natural forces at work for your growth and for your publisher's growth; and the little artificial tricks of the trade whereby a flashy story has a "run"—into swift oblivion—will pass from your mind and from his. You will both be doing your best work.

After all, the authors of any generation generally have the publishers that they deserve to have; and this axiom is reversible. For my part, while I am as glad as Podunk, Exploitem & Company to have novels that will sell 100,000 copies, provided they give clean and decent amusement, I take no permanent interest in anything that comes this month and goes the next; nor does any serious man. My wish and aim is to

become a helpful partner of some of the men and women of my generation who can, by their writings, lay the great democracy that we all serve under obligations to them for a new impulse. By serving them, I, too, serve my country and my time. And, when I say that this is my aim and wish, I could say with equal truth that it is the aim and wish of every other real publisher. But, as every good physician constantly wonders at the ignorance and credulity of otherwise sensible men who seek quacks, so I wonder at the simplicity of many respectable writers of books in seeking publishers. Of downright quacks in the publishing world, there are not many. But there are incompetents a-plenty and a fair share of adventurers.

We shall both—authors and publishers—get the proper cue if we regard the swarming, eager democracy all about us as a mass of constantly rising men and women, ambitious to grow, with the

same higher impulses that we feel in our best moods; and if we interpret our duty as the high privilege of ministering to these higher impulses and not to their lower senses, without commercialism on one side and without academicism on the other, men among men, worthy among the worthy, we may make our calling under such a conception a calling that leads.

# On Editorship

# ON EDITORSHIP

*An article which appeared in the* WORLD'S WORK *in January, 1913, under the title, "What the World's Work is Trying To Do."*

My associates ask that I write what we are trying to do with this magazine, thereby going squarely against the first principle of good editing. That first principle is that every piece published shall be interesting; and in such an article there is less a tale to tell than an explanation to make.

The group of men who direct the WORLD'S WORK have a very definite aim, however often they miss it, and we are very much in earnest. Earnestness, mind you, does not mean solemnity, and we try to keep it from meaning dullness. The aim is—every reader of the magazine knows it as well as we do—so to

report and to interpret representative activities of our time as to give the reader a well-proportioned knowledge of what sort of things are happening in the world—in the American world in particular. It may be a political campaign, it may be a woman's "movement," it may be the building of a great dam across the Mississippi River; it may be explanations of scientific discovery and of new scientific theories; it may be the industrial progress of the Northwest or of the Southeast; it may be the breeding of better grain or of better cotton; the making of fitter schools; the waste of money and the degradation of men by unworthy pensions;—it may be anything typical of the activities of the people and worthy of the attention of thoughtful persons; and in the course of a year the magazine ought to contain articles about all sorts of these important activities.

We work in constant conference; for it is all team-work. Every man knows and every man must know what every other one is doing; and in our conferences we decide what volunteer articles we shall accept and we make plans for our outside friends who help us write—for such articles, for example, as Mr. Stockbridge went West to write, and as Professor Orth of Cornell is writing about the labor war.

It is a cheerful and exhilarating occupation; for we must keep an eye on all sorts of human activities and meet and learn from men of all helpful sorts. The real reward of the editorial life is in the friends and acquaintances that one has occasion (and necessity) to make. No sort of active and useful man or woman is foreign to our plans or purposes. Of course not even a much larger group of men than we are could possibly know many subjects thoroughly; but each of us has his own kinds of tasks—one, sub-

jects of social welfare; another, political subjects; another, financial and commercial subjects; another, rural life and education, and so on; and each does his reading and makes acquaintances that lead to increasing knowledge of his group of subjects. Consequently we must go about the United States and see what men are doing. The theory is that at least one editor of the magazine shall visit every section of the country at least once a year, and, of course, at times other countries also. One of the most pleasing compliments ever paid to us was said in half jest by a man who had led a closet-life: "Why, you really regard Wyoming and Louisiana as parts of the United States." The real work of making a "live" magazine cannot be done in an office.

There is, therefore, no mystery about the work: the main thing to be said about it is that it is work, unceasing, hard work; but do not forget that it is

interesting work. If an article does not interest us, it is pretty sure not to interest the reader; for we are men of different temperaments, of unanimity only in ideals and in purpose, men of different kinds of training, of somewhat different outlooks on life. Yet nothing has ever appeared in the magazine about which we had any serious disagreement; and, of course, no man ever writes anything that he does not profoundly believe. The note of sincerity is as necessary in a magazine as it is in a man. You can't make any genuine periodical with "literary operatives." If we should encounter subjects or plans or policies about which there was radical disagreement, we should, I presume, leave them alone. So far we have not encountered them.

Nor is the editorial department the whole magazine. There is still wider team-work throughout the publishing house of which it is a part. It is coör-

dinated with other activities, to the benefit of all. The other owners of the magazine at times contribute most helpfully to the stock of editorial ideas. There is a luncheon on every Wednesday at which all the editors and all the owners sit down to talk over the WORLD'S WORK. One day the talk may turn on editorial subjects, another day on the financial condition of the business, another day on the manufacture of it, on another day on the advertising department, on another day on all these subjects. There are no secrets that one department or group keeps from the other. Such conferences would be of no value if they were not open and frank; and there is no opinion or suggestion ever held back for fear of anybody's disapproval. The atmosphere is as free as any group of men can make and keep it; for not a man has to do with the magazine who has any other interest to serve or any other business to engage

him. You could not make a helpful and interesting periodical as an incident to any other business or "interest"; and many a one has failed by such an effort.

Of course, there is not unanimity about every detail in so large a body of men. Why should there be? For instance, when the political campaign came on last year, the policy of the magazine was determined by the editor, who is the court of last appeal, if there be any occasion for appeal. There were in the group some men who differed with the political policy of the magazine. What better corrective influence against sheer partisanship could be devised? This, I am sure, was a lucky circumstance—lucky in one instance at least; for when an article in proof was read by a dissenter he made the valuable criticism that it was less than fair to his side. The unnecessary cruelty of the criticism was omitted, and the magazine was the better for it—at least in temper.

Did I not warn you that all this is dull? I mean that the telling of it is uninteresting, for the doing of it is always interesting. For example: We described the farm demonstration work in the Southern States whereby two bales of cotton were made to grow where one bale grew before; and a gentleman in North Dakota read about it and set to work to have similar instruction given to the farmers in his state, at a cost of more than $80,000 a year. A missionary in India read about the eradication of the hookworm in our semi-tropical regions and he wrote for information. It happened that he lived at the place with which the American Hookworm Commission most desired to get into communication. A man came to this office one day and said: "You had a little article about farming profits in a certain part of the country last year. I read it and said that you had been imposed on. But I had occasion to

visit the place last month and I invested $100,000 there. You didn't tell the story half strong enough." There are now in this office letters from men who say they have more than a million dollars to invest in farms, asking suggestions about soils and climates and markets and such like things. (One man, by the way, gives his whole time and takes much of the time of the editors, too, in answering questions about every conceivable thing.) Of course, many millions of dollars are invested in conservative securities on the advice of the financial department; and many magazines imitate the WORLD'S WORK in maintaining such a department.

But these are obvious, concrete, reportable results. A better result is the influence on public opinion of some of the policies emphasized by the WORLD'S WORK. Sometimes these are not popular. Take the abuse of the pension-roll as an example. There has been a de-

cided stiffening of opinion and of courage since Mr. Hale's and Mr. Charles Francis Adams's articles were published in the WORLD'S WORK two years ago. Many newspapers that had before been uninformed now demand that the roll be made public and thereby purged of unworthy names; and the opposition in Congress to "any old pension" scheme grows stronger yearly.

Evidences multiply of the effect of educational articles that the magazine has published. A description of a good school always suggests the same plan to persons in another part of the country.

This sort of thing has occurred time and again. The WORLD'S WORK has found a country preacher or a country teacher who did his job so well that there was inspiration for others in the story of it. As soon as a description of such a man's or woman's work was published they began to receive invitations to lecture and presently they found

themselves so famous that they were called from their fields of labor to organize society in general. This is one of the misfortunes of fame.

The results that justify the magazine's existence are what educational folk, who love long words, call "inspirational." It carries to one man or to one group of men a story of what somebody else is doing and gives fruitful suggestions. For instance, an account of Dr. Dowling's health-train and of his energetic work toward the cleaning up of Louisiana set boards of health and sanitary officers at work in many other communities.

The first quality required to make a helpful magazine is a balanced judgment, an intellectual inability to be drawn off into the advocacy of any fad or cure-all, or to allow one's personal tastes and particular enthusiasms to dominate the whole periodical—in a word, the refusal to become sensational.

"Movements" are necessary and desirable in the free life of the United States; but the free life of the United States is a very complex thing, and no "movement" carries all salvation with it. Good judgment calls for the reporting of all sorts of good work but for very wary acceptance of all men's burning enthusiasms. Common sense is the most useful quality that you can get into an editorial office.

In the execution of the task of making a magazine, the greatest practical difficulty is the difficulty of finding men who can write with simple directness and still put the glow of conviction and of "human interest" in their writing. I have on my desk now this report from one of my associates on a manuscript:

> "This is a horrible example of what a college professor can do to obscure a good idea by means of a magazine article. The idea itself is interesting and it emerges first on page 8."

Every word of this report is true. The first seven pages are dull commonplace

—the same sort of things that thousands of writers have written as the first seven pages of a manuscript about thousands of subjects. One of these days we shall have post-graduate schools of writing at our universities, or somewhere else, where young men will be taught to omit at least half of what they feel moved to write "in a state of nature" —to present their messages directly and briefly, with charm and enthusiasm. It required ten years full of many experiments to get together (out of twenty or more men) the four who do the main work of making this magazine.

At intervals, we have asked blocks of our subscribers what parts or qualities of the WORLD'S WORK they think most highly of and what they find least helpful, and we have asked for suggestions. Many corrective and suggestive comments come, but few constructive ideas —naturally enough, for it is not the business of men who buy the magazine

to make it. But those who are kind enough to answer such inquiries do a great service by giving the editors, sometimes unconsciously, the point of view of the readers that they are trying to serve. It is always helpful to meet and to talk with or to read letters from such persons.

The truth is, the successful editing of such a magazine is in reality the interpretation of the people, their revelation to themselves; and this cannot be done except by men who know the reading and thoughtful people of the whole country, or as many of them as possible.

This is what with all humility and earnestness we are trying to do, regarding the magazine as an instrument of reporting the people's activities and thought in the widest and most helpful and sympathetic way, with directness of speech and with a joyful confidence in the soundness of American life. This leaves no room for merely personal jour-

nalism nor for becoming the organ of any "cause" or "party" or man or doctrine or school. The whole American people is a good master to serve. But any sect or section or party of them would be a tyrannical master. The evangelist has his uses but they are not the highest uses.

The American public is surfeited with magazines; for, as a business, the making of them is greatly overdone. Many lead a precarious life. Many are bankrupt. Many more, whose purpose is chiefly commercial, try this tack and then that; for profitable sensations enough cannot be found to maintain them. The public does not show the nicest discrimination—in fact, there are many publics; but in the long run the half-dozen or more magazines that serve thoughtful people year in and year out by honest work find permanent friends, whom it is a great privilege and joy to serve. One of the most pleasing facts

about the WORLD'S WORK is that a much larger percentage of its subscribers renew their subscriptions year after year than is usual with most magazines. This is a guarantee of sufficient stability to make us sure that we are doing some service and that it is a natural and normal and not a merely spasmodic service.

And on those rare occasions when it seems no violation of good taste to write about the magazine (and it is hoped that this is such an occasion) the one thought that comes first and comes strongest is gratitude for the appreciation that has been shown year after year by readers in all the walks of life. You may see in our files a letter from an illiterate carpenter in Maine close beside a letter from a President of the United States and a president of a university, and a banker and a farmer—from all sorts of men—saying that they find the WORLD'S WORK worth while. That's reward enough; and what we are try-

ing to do is to deserve the thanks that men like these send us, by a real service in reporting the significant activities of our many-sided life with the hopeful and helpful spirit that every well-balanced man must have when he studies it in the large. To know the American people in our time is a great privilege and a constant inspiration; and we do on occasion—as on a New Year—feel that such work brings us a realization of the majesty of our democracy.

# On Writing

# ON WRITING

*An article which appeared in the* ATLANTIC MONTHLY'S *50th Anniversary Number, November, 1907, under the title, "The Writer and the University."*

I

I write this paper to show, if I can, why men and women who propose to write for a living ought to have the benefit of professional training, as men and women may now have professional training who propose to practice any other art; why post-graduate professional schools for writers at our universities would make good writing more common, by dignifying and improving the everyday practice of the art; why such schools of practice, vigorously conducted, would give new life also to the literary studies in our universities; and

why they would, I think, make more common among the educated class a good use of both written and spoken language.

I may prevent confusion of thought by saying at the outset that I am not now writing about what the schoolmen usually call literature, nor about men and women of "genius." I am writing only about those who write every day or every week for their livelihood, and about what we generally call current literature. I pray you before reading farther, then, to set aside in a special class all young persons whose writings you are sure will be read with joy fifty years hence, or even five years hence; for they, I grant, may be pardoned for ignoring teachers. Nor have I anything to say about those persons who have contracted the divine afflatus, nor those for whom "professors of English" predict brilliant careers because they have written excellent undergraduate themes.

I have in mind only the big volume of writing that is done every day in the United States by journeymen writers, and the need of training us to do our work better, us who regard our trade as an honest and difficult occupation at which we wish to excel.

Such journeymen's writing has now come to be an important trade for several reasons. In the first place, journeymen writers write almost everything that the American people read. They write our advertisements; they write our newspapers; they write our magazines; they write our novels; they write our scientific books; they write travels and adventures for us; they write our histories and biographies; they write our textbooks,—all our books of instruction from almanacs to encyclopædias. Leaving out the reading that is done by a small class and that done by students chiefly during the period of formal education, most of the writing that is read

in the United States is written by persons who write for a living; most of it was written during the last few years, much of it within the last year, much of it, in fact, within the last month, and a good deal of it was written yesterday. The journeymen writers write almost all that almost all Americans read. This is a fact that we love to fool ourselves about. We talk about "literature" and we talk about "hack writers," implying that the reading that we do is of literature. The truth all the while is, we read little else than the writing of the hacks, —living hacks, that is, men and women who write for pay. We may hug the notion that our life and thought are not really affected by current literature, that we read the living writers only for utilitarian reasons, and that our real intellectual life is fed by the great dead writers. But our hugging this delusion does not change the fact that the intellectual life even of most educated persons, and

certainly of the mass of the population, is fed chiefly by the writers of our own time. Let us hope that the great writers of the past do set the standards whereby a few judge the writing of the present. But, even if this be true, it is still true also that the intellectual life of the American people is chiefly shaped by current writing.

And the writers' craft is now become a very large craft. In numbers it ranks perhaps second or third among the professions. There are more teachers and possibly more lawyers than there are persons who make their living wholly or in the main part by writing; and possibly there are as many physicians. But, if you could count the reporters and correspondents, the special writers for the newspapers, the makers of textbooks, the writers for magazines, the novelists, the playwrights, the writers of governmental and other public documents, and all the rest who

make their living wholly or in the main part by writing, you would be astonished to see how large a company they are.

The craft has come to be a fairly well paid craft, too. No writers make such great fortunes as some lawyers, nor even such fortunes as some physicians and surgeons make; but many of them make more money than most lawyers and most physicians; and they are better paid than teachers and preachers. By sheer economic demand, therefore, writing as a career is attracting as capable men and women as most of the other professions and almost as many of them as any other. It is an interesting fact, too, that the earnings of writers during the last twenty years have increased faster than the earnings of most of the other professions. The writers of current literature, then, form a craft influential enough, big enough, and well enough paid to deserve as careful train-

ing as those who ply the other trades which we usually call professions.

Regarding the skill and character of current writers, it is probable that they fall below the level of lawyers in the excellence of their craftsmanship, but not in the character that their work shows, and that they do no better than physicians and perhaps as badly as teachers and preachers. Of course they ought to do a great deal better than teachers or preachers, because they both teach and preach to all the people all the time, and not merely on Sundays or during the period of school age. Newspaper writing, of course, runs from very good to very bad. The most important part of it, which is the reporter's part, is generally very bad. Magazine writing is just shaping itself into a craft. Until a few years ago it was a side-product of scholars and men of action. Most of it was then very proper and stilted, just as much of it now imitates the vices of

the newspaper. The American magazine is just finding its power and its opportunity, and shaping its character to definite ends. It is become the most influential form of current literature and the chance that it offers for strong men is just beginning to be understood.

Concerning current book-writing, it is true, I suppose, that our best novelists are, as a rule, the best writers of our time, just as our worst novelists are the worst. The average quality of writing in current books is probably higher than the average was a generation ago, and surely a very much larger number of persons write reasonably well than ever before. But is it not fair to say that a general view of the whole mass of new books that come out year by year would show that as a rule our book writers do not do a high grade of work? The most common fault is a lack of form, of orderliness, and of construction. A certain

verbal smartness is very common, but the careful construction of books is rare.

There are two great departments of current literature that are very badly written. One is what may be called the literature of reports and documents,—from commercial reports to governmental documents. The waste in printing these, if it could be saved, would be enough, I am sure, richly to endow a professional school of writing at half the colleges in the land. So badly are governmental reports and documents written, as a rule, that the public seldom finds out what the government, municipal, state, or national, is doing. This is one cause of bad political conditions. Large amounts of money are spent to gather useful information which is so ill told that it remains practically unknown. The national government, for instance, through all its departments and bureaus at Washington, prints an incalculable mass of things at an enor-

mous cost, which it cannot give away because they are so ill written that nobody wants them. Nothing is gained by this waste of labor and of paper, and yet nobody seems able to stop it or to change the "system," or even to induce those in authority to employ men to edit such of these reports as might be read if they were written with common intelligibility.

The other department of current literature that is such "tough" reading that much of it is valueless is the work of academic men, the publications of many societies, the monographs and "theses" and "studies" of teachers and students of our universities,—books on science, on historical subjects, even on politics and sociology, which fail of their purpose because they are written without form or style. Some of our academic men go on year after year piling up these unreadable things, as the government writers go on piling up their

unreadable things; and the habit has become so fixed that they are even held in esteem for writing unintelligibly. The public is asked to believe that learning makes unintelligibility necessary.

A professor of English literature in one of our universities once brought to me to publish in this magazine such a learned piece of writing. It seemed to me a pretty dull thing and not important, according to my judgment, to anybody, and not possibly interesting to more than a handful of special students. I wrote him this opinion as politely as I could. He came to see me again and smilingly took me into his confidence. "I hardly expected," he said, "that you would publish that 'study' that I offered you. In fact, I care little about it myself. I wrote it because my professional standing demands that I shall produce something at certain intervals. But now I have a piece of writing that I do take great pride in, and I want you

to publish it without betraying the authorship to any living being. It would hurt my professional standing if it became known that I wrote this." It was a novel!

Well, Scott wrote novels, and Thackeray, and Goethe, and Turgénieff, and some great writers of every modern nation that has a literature. It is truly often a much debased form of literature in our day, but the most powerful living form for all that; and that a professor of English literature should assume an apologetic attitude toward it sets a plain journeyman to thinking. His dissertation was published in one of the learned organs of his university and duly catalogued by title, by subject, and by author in the library. His novel has, so far as I know, never been published. Of course any editor or any publisher could tell dozens of such experiences to illustrate how in a didactic and critical atmosphere a man is forced against his

will to compile burdensome erudition that is of no value, and is permitted by the false feeling about him to try his imagination and creative powers only as a secret pleasure. The tragedy of it is, such a man does not become either a great scholar or a tolerable novelist. In the first place, he never learns even the fundamental graces of an English style.

To return to our poor craft of journeymen writers,—please regard us all as a class, as a craft, as a profession (call us what you will). Think of writers for newspapers, for magazines, writers of governmental reports, of advertisements, of novels, of books of information, poets, —all who make it their business to write and who earn all or part of their incomes by writing; think of us all, if you can, as you think of any other class of workers,—physicians, or teachers, or architects, for examples. You will discover that there is one great difference between your conception of writers and

your conception of physicians. Although you know that there are all kinds of physicians, good and bad, when I say that a man is a physician, that fact at once classifies him in your mind, no matter how many incompetent physicians there are. You take it for granted that he has been trained at a school of medicine, that he practices his profession in an orderly way, that he has a certain definite body of knowledge and a certain minimum degree of skill. He may be a skillful or an unskillful physician. But the bare fact that he is a member of the profession means something. But, when I say that a man is a writer, what does that convey to any mind? an impertinent newspaper reporter, or a gutter novelist, or a historian, or a professor in a university? You get no clear-cut notion at all; and you say that there is no such profession of writing as there is of physicking people, or of teaching them, or of preaching to them, or of

building houses for them. Yet as many persons earn their livings by writing as by practicing medicine, and they serve society in quite as important ways. There was a time, not very long ago, when professional training was not thought necessary, or at least was not provided, for the other professions. The barber bled his patient. The young lawyer "read law" in the office of an older lawyer. The engineer learned his trade in any way he could. Even now the teacher is just coming to have a professional standing and consciousness. All these callings gradually came to have a definite relation to society and some dignity of position by special professional training. As soon as opportunities for such special professional training were given, a definite body of knowledge and a definite degree of skill were required of the best practitioners. Quacks and incompetents yet flourish, and they always will. Still, medical

schools and pedagogical schools find justification, and they keep raising the standard of knowledge and of skill. Professional writers have yet no standard or standing, as a class. Why could their profession not profit by the experience of these others?

The successful practice of the writer's craft, whether as a novelist, a reporter, an historian, a writer of advertisements or what not, surely requires a degree of experience and professional skill. Yet our educational institutions do not seem to be aware of this fact. For instance, a little while ago I received a letter from the president of a college asking me to give "magazine writing" to a gentlewoman of cultivation who had been overtaken by misfortune. If he had asked me to get her a place in grand opera, he would not have made a more absurd request. Every year a procession of young men and women comes from the colleges to the newspaper of-

fices, the publishing houses, and the magazine offices, who wish to make their living by writing. Many of them bring pathetically simple letters from their professors of English. They are ready to begin to instruct or to amuse the nation, and the professors predict great things for them. Sometimes, in utter despair, we who work at current literature with hammers and anvils say to them, "Well, you wish to write?"

"Yes."

"Go and write, then; nobody will hinder you. We will buy your writing and publish it if it be good enough."

"Oh, but I wish to learn."

"Well, we are sorry, but we don't keep school. We must deal in finished products."

They must serve, of course, a long apprenticeship and then fall short of doing as well as they could have been taught to do; for the masters to whom they are apprenticed have no time, even if

they have the skill, to teach them systematically. They pick up the tricks of the craft rather than learn its principles; and in this harum-scarum, untrained way they come in time to write perhaps half the matter that the American people read. Then these same professors of English, and suchlike gentlemen, who do not themselves write, complain that our newspapers and magazines and novels are ill written.

Nor is even this the worst of it. Most of the young men who come thus raw into the trade come with high aims; they have literary standards; they have worthy ambitions. But they soon discover that the trade is not the making of "literature." They have not been prepared by a reasonable amount of practice even to understand what writing, day by day, means. They have their heads full of "literary" notions, which are, as a rule, very false notions. They are not prepared for the orderly

practice of a useful art. They hope rather to do some great piece of work quickly. They are in a false relation to work and to life. When the inevitable disillusion comes, they either lose ambition and sink into hopeless drudgery, or they lose their bearings and run off into "yellow" journalism, where they can at least do spectacular jobs and earn (for a little while) more money.

Thus, although many capable and ambitious youths come to the doors of the writers' workshops, so few of them are properly prepared to begin work or even look upon it in a proper way,—as young physicians look upon their work, or as young lawyers, or as young architects, —so few come with proper preparation or in the proper state of mind, that the demand for honest, capable, trained journeymen writers is not supplied. Every editor of a magazine, every editor of an earnest and worthy newspaper, every publisher of books, has dozens or

hundreds of important tasks for which he cannot find capable men: tasks that require scholarship, knowledge of science, or of politics, or of industry, or of literature, along with experience in writing accurately in the language of the people. The profession is yet a harum-scarum, rough-and-tumble business into which men and women come chiefly from our universities, with academic superstitions instead of principles; and every one has to blaze his own way. And this in a democracy where public opinion rules congresses and presidents and courts, and where the machinery for the proper training of men, one would think, would be especially adjusted to the training of those who are to write the public journals, adjusted to training at once the judgment and the style of men who are to write; for even style requires most excellent good judgment.

We complain, and we complain justly, of the commercialization of the press

and, to a degree, of all current literature. And it would be strange if it had escaped commercialization in this rush of industrialism which is the most striking fact of our time; for all the professions have to some extent suffered the same misfortune. But, if the press is commercialized, it is not the writers who have commercialized it. They are the victims of this commercialization. We have left the writing to be done by those who lack the strength and the skill that come from good training, and the forces of commercialism have found many of them easy victims. For most men when they set out to write set out with high aims. The first impulse that drives men to their pens is usually a noble impulse. They wish to teach their fellows. They wish to win names for themselves. They wish to exert a good influence. When they succumb they succumb because they are weak rather than because they are depraved. Yet the strong man who

can write well is the man of real power. He can capture and command the machinery of publicity. If, then, this great machinery of publicity is controlled and used too much by sheer commercial men, this has come to pass because strong men have not been trained as good writers. Is it not true, then, that our universities, which are justly offended at the commercialization of current literature, have failed of their duty to prevent it?

For the usual undergraduate practice of composition and study of the English language and literature, good enough as far as they go, go little farther toward training a boy for writing than the usual undergraduate courses in mathematics go toward training him as an astronomer or as an engineer. Nor can undergraduate work do more. There is not time to do more. Nor has the undergraduate sufficient maturity to learn more than the rudiments of so difficult an art.

II

A proper course of practice and study for such a professional post-graduate school could be prepared only by men who are both good writers and good teachers, and only after some experience. But the general principles that should guide them are obvious. No student ought to be admitted who has not such a "general education" and such maturity as an A. B. degree implies; and only such students ought to be admitted as mean to make their living and their careers by writing, and only such as show some aptitude for the art, some facility of expression, some love of the right use of speech, and who get joy from its right use.

The teachers in such a professional school ought to be scholars in literature and men who have a good sense of right speech; men, too, who are themselves writers of some degree of skill, not mere

lecturers, and not mere scholars. Writing is an art, and the teaching would be too theoretical if it were done by men who are not themselves practitioners of the art, just as the teaching of painting would be too theoretical that should be done by men who cannot paint fairly well themselves. No man can write well who has not written a good deal; and I doubt whether a man could be a successful teacher of good writing who had not written much.

The main work in such a school would be practice, just as the main work in a school for painters or sculptors or musicians must be practice. We should have to throw away at the gate the notion that mere scholarship is a sufficient equipment for a successful writer. For scholarship alone never made a good writer; nor did reading alone ever make one, however close and loving communion a man may have with great writers. This fallacy lingers in our academic life

as stubbornly as the dogma of the divine afflatus itself.

Suppose every student were required to write a thousand words a day,—for a time narrative, such as biography or a bit of history; then description, then argument, then a novel, then a play, then for a time, instead of tasks in prose, a sonnet a day or practice in other forms of verse. A student who should write a thousand words a day would in a year of three hundred working days gain such practice as the writing of three books of the usual size of a novel would give. In three years he would have written as much as nine such books contain. Of course, his writings would every day have to undergo the criticism of his teacher and of his fellows. No teacher could properly have more than half a dozen students, and the teacher himself ought to write as much as any of his students. They ought, at times at least, to write together, and about the

same subjects. Doubtless it would be helpful, as Robert Louis Stevenson found it helpful, sometimes to write in conscious imitation of great writers, one after another.

Of course, there must go along with this practice definite, well-planned courses of post-graduate study in language and in literature. In most post-graduate work that I know of in the United States such studies now take the direction given by the philologists or the historians. Theirs is a science, not an art. The results of philological study are necessary for a good writer; but, if he get himself deeply entangled in philology for its own sake, he may become a great scholar, but the chances are that he will never learn the art of writing. To the philologist a word is material for historical study. To a writer a word is an instrument of expression, a tool. He must know his tools well to use them well, but he cannot give himself to the study of the his-

tory of tools. The same may be said of the historical study of literature. Of the great literature itself no writer who wishes to do his best can be ignorant. He must steep himself in it. He must continue to live with it; for no man can write his best who does not read great writers constantly. He will gain incalculably, too, if he can read the ancient as well as the modern.

By the time a young man, in such a post-graduate school, had written the equivalent of eight or ten books in prose and verse, under the guidance of a master who had himself written perhaps as much, and with the criticism of his fellows, and had in the meantime also constantly read masters of style, he would at least know whether the writing life is likely to offer the career that he seeks and whether the divine afflatus blows toward him. He would have shown some degree of earnestness; he would have worked out certain definite prin-

ciples of the craft; he would have acquired a certain degree of skill as an artificer in words and in the orderly arrangement of thought; and he would be likely to begin the practice of the craft with a clearer understanding than he had when he began his professional training of what the career that he has chosen demands of a man,—in resolution, in ideals, in practice, and in character. And this also surely is true: for them that are fitted by temperament and by capacity for such a calling, these years of training the productive faculties, these years of progressive effort at creation, would be happy and inspiring years. I have never known a successful and earnest writer of current literature who did not wish that he had had such training.

Indeed, it is hard to understand why such schools were not long ago opened at our universities. Those who write for their living are the only large class

of skilled workmen for whom professional schools are not provided. Our universities train men not only for the old professions, but they train them to be dentists, pharmacists, foresters, veterinarians, and sociologists. Although nobody supposes that a boy as soon as he finishes his undergraduate life is prepared to begin work at any of these callings, he is supposed even by our educational masters to be prepared to begin work as a writer. These youth surely have as good a claim to professional training as those who wish to practice these other professions. Nor is there any doubt about the demand for such training. Any university that should open such a professional school with well-equipped teachers would have more applicants than the school could properly receive; and, after any one of our principal universities establishes such a school, others will soon follow the example. The demand for those young men,

too, in the working world, who had creditably finished a three years' course in such a school would far outrun the supply for many years to come.

III

There are other reasons for post-graduate, professional practice - schools for young scholars who wish to learn to write, and even stronger reasons than those that I have named. For so far I have written only of the needs of the writing craft. But do our universities themselves not need such schools for their own sake and for the better adjustment of their work and influence to our democratic society?

The dominant method of training in the university work of our time is by research. The higher academic degrees are given for research work. Men are chosen for college faculties who have won these higher degrees. Their mental habit and their methods of teaching

are shaped by this method of training. This is the right method of acquiring facts and of acquiring skill in acquiring facts, for it is the scientific method. But, while it is the proper method for scientific work and training, it is not the proper method for the teaching of an art. You cannot apply it to painting, to sculpture, to music, or to the great art of writing.

But the method of training by research has so dominated our university activity that the teaching of the arts has been neglected. Our higher teaching of English has run to philology; our higher teaching of literature has run to such tasks as the tracing of mediæval legends from one language to another. These are scientific pursuits; and one result of their domination of university methods is a neglect of the art of expression, even a sort of contempt for it. You will find this contempt in our schools of science. A scientific man who can

write well—write, I mean, in language that everybody can understand—is looked at by his fellows with suspicion. He is considered a "popularizer," a man who plays to the galleries. It is not considered good form to write well. It is a mark of weakness to cultivate style, or to think about methods of expression, except to make sure of accuracy.

We can see how this neglectful attitude toward good writing has worked sad harm to many of our historical students, for example. There have been published during the last ten or fifteen years a large number of books about the history of the United States, most of them by historical scholars who work in our colleges and universities. They are historical investigators, scientific men. Their first aim—and it is properly the first aim of any man who has to do with history—is to make sure of accuracy, to trace every statement to an original source. So far so good. But

when they come to writing history they come to a task of another kind. So long as they are investigating facts it is proper and necessary that every fact should be set down in a row in its proper relation to every fact that comes before and to every fact that goes after it, and then put into a chain. In investigation one fact is of as much importance as any other fact, and a chain is no stronger than its weakest link.

But, as soon as the writing of history begins, one fact is no longer of as much importance as another fact. It is still necessary to be accurate, and no fact may be set down wrong. But sheer accuracy is not enough to make a good narrative. To make a good narrative is an art. The historical investigator must now become an artist. He must not give all his facts equal emphasis. He cannot even use all his facts. For a work of art is often made effective quite

as much by what is left out of it as by what is put into it.

But many of our historical students hold the art of expression in almost as low esteem as other scientific men hold it. They think it a mark of weakness to try to write well. They regard it as their sole business to be accurate. They do not regard it as their business to be graceful. They do not understand that the task that they have in hand as writers of history is an artistic and not a scientific task. They do not see that they must now make pictures,—produce artistic effects. They ought not, as historical writers, to be making mere chains of their facts. They ought to group them, putting a strong emphasis on the big facts, a light emphasis on the little facts. They must have a strong light here, a shadow there. They must relieve their narrative by descriptions. They must put men into their procession of events. The reader must under-

stand the historical characters that he reads about, and see them as clearly as we see men in the best portraits. He must hear them talk and come to know them. The writing of history is not a scientific pursuit: it is an artistic task.

Thus (I hope that I do not write too harsh a judgment) the art of writing well has come to be much neglected in our educational life; its value has come to be misunderstood. It has, to a degree, even come to be despised. So, far from being cultivated, except in rudimentary undergraduate work, it is left almost to take care of itself. The result is slovenly expressed erudition. The result is a too low value set on good speech or good writing even by the educated class. The result is a great gap between our scholars and the rest of the community. The result is that men of learning do not deliver to the people the knowledge that is gained by science and by historical study. The result is a de-

tachment of our universities from the life of the people, and their loss of control and even of authority over the intellectual life of the nation; for the medium of communication is neglected.

We hear much of the cultural value of this study or of that. No subject has a very great cultural value that is studied in a dumb way; for is the art of expression not the basis as well as the medium of the best culture? If the best method of acquiring facts is the method of research, surely the best method of acquiring culture, of acquiring skill in any art, the best method of developing a man for creative (and not merely acquisitive) work is the method of practice, and not exclusively the method of investigation nor yet the method of criticism,—I mean that kind of criticism which men try to exalt into a department of literature, as it is not and never can be.

After a man has written a book and

published it, criticism of it seldom helps him, unless he have made errors of fact that may be corrected: Helpful criticism is a personal and friendly and intimate service that can be best done in private; and public criticism usually hardens a writer in his wrong ways by arousing his resentment. The idea that mere criticism of literature will set up a standard whereby men will do their own work well is fallacious; for any standard so wrought out and set up soon becomes remote and theoretical, if it be disassociated from practice. It is at best a sort of secondhand knowledge. It does little to lift the level of the achievement of young men themselves. The time to criticise writing, for artistic improvement, is before it is published; and the only criticism that helps a man to write better is his own criticism and that of fellow workmen while he is still writing. Yet it is chiefly by such criticism or by the criticism of literature in general that

our universities seek to train youth in literature. If the energy and the subtlety that are given to the criticism of dead writers—in the vain effort to make criticism a living part of literature—were spent in efforts at production (teachers and pupils writing together and severely criticising one another as they write), a working and inspiring standard in production would be set up.

Moreover (and this is the most serious matter of all), where literature is taught by the historical method and by the critical method and by the method of research, to the practical exclusion of the method of severe and continuous practice in writing,—in such an intellectual atmosphere the feeling grows and becomes at last a conviction, that literature is a closed chapter of human experience, and that it has all been written; and men forget—young men do not even find out—that literature is a continuous expression of every phase of human

experience in every period, that it must be continuous, that every generation must contribute to it, ill or well, whether it know it or not; that literature must be written in the present and in the future, and that no man can tell when a great outburst of it will come, or who will write it, or what forms it will take, or whether it will even be recognized when it appears. Youth in our training do not have that feeling of expectancy in literature, that bounding hope, which youth ought to have as a right of its eagerness of spirit; for we do not whet their minds for actual experiment with their own creative impulses. Do we not rather overawe them with the greatness of the past and discourage them by hopelessness of the present? Such is the inevitable intellectual result of exalting the function of those useful drudges, the commentator and the critic, over the creative impulse itself. Vigorous efforts in the practice of any art are necessary

to keep alive a keen appreciation of that art. Vigorous efforts to do good writing are necessary to implant and to keep really alive a proper appreciation of great literature. This is, in fact, the only way to teach or to study great literature so as to make it a vital and not a mere theoretical force in men's lives,—the only way to keep the stream of literature flowing clear and strong, the only way to keep alive the consciousness that it flows all the time, shallow or deep, muddy or clear, do what we will. For men study most lovingly and profoundly what they themselves wish to do or to imitate or to live by.

Thus a plea for the training of the poor, honest "hack" leads to a plea for a more vigorous and direct study of literature in our universities, study by sustained practice, which is the counterpart of the study of science by research. For the study of literature—of the "humanities"—does it not need in-

vigorating? Is not the imitation by our teachers of literature of the more vigorous scientific men a confession of a lapse from the place that they once held in the training of youth? Have they not lost something of their rightful influence in making "educated" men cultivated men and in keeping alive among the educated class a proper appreciation of good literature? And has this loss of influence of the "cultural" studies not had much to do with the neglect both of good speech and of good writing by this generation of Americans? And has this in turn not made the way easier for all the spectacular quacks in current literature? And has this loss of literary power not come because our teachers of literature have forsaken the high laborious method of practice and substituted for it the scientific teacher's method of research?

I verily believe that vigorous post-graduate schools for the professional

training of writers would attract a number of our most capable youth, would put a new life into literary study at our colleges, by setting up a high working standard instead of merely theoretical standards, would lift the practice and dignify the calling of the professional writer, and would bring our academic life into a more helpful relation to the production of literature and build up the speech of the people. It might again become the mark of an educated American gentleman that he should write well, and a test of an American scholar that he should be more than a vast, dumb Teutonic voracity,—be also a man of some gifts and graces in the democracy in which he lives, a democracy whose intellectual masters yet are masters of the people's speech.

IV

Of course there are objections and difficulties. Many educated men do not believe that good writing can be taught

by any such direct effort. The style is the man. Therefore, as the man is, so will his style be. This is the same as to say that you need not bother with nature's handiwork. Those that are born to write need no teaching: those that are born unable to write cannot be taught. Old Divine Afflatus dies hard. Many contend, too, that the usual undergraduate theme work and the usual study of the old thing called Rhetoric are all that you can do in the way of direct aid to young writers. They maintain that you can teach men to write only by causing them to read the great masters of style. They think that it is wholly a question of intellectual breeding and association. Men who grow up with a knowledge of the great writers and learn to love good reading will, they say, learn to write well, at least as well as anybody could teach them. That objection is easy to answer. Simply gather your facts. Make a list of the

best-read persons you know and set down opposite every name the writings of every one of them, and you will be surprised to find how few of them have written much, and even more surprised to find of how little importance to the world most of the writing is that they have done.

The truth is, if the habit of merely acquiring knowledge be cultivated in the formative time of life, too much to the neglect of the faculties of creation and of expression, these faculties of expression become atrophied, and they are never used. We have all known scholarly men who talked all their lives of what they were soon going to write, and who went on acquiring but never wrote. I do not mean to say that the lives of such men were misspent; but I do mean to say that we cannot depend on such men to do our writing. Those whose acquisitive faculties only are used in their youth are likely to use only these

same faculties in their manhood, and they seldom do creative work. They at best become commentators and expounders.

Another objection is that young men who are just out of college do not know anything to write about, that good writing requires knowledge and a good deal of experience of life. Yes, but these same young men who would gladly be trained to write will write without training; and surely a three years' course of practice and study would not leave them more ignorant of facts than it found them. It ought to strengthen their judgment and to train them in methods of acquiring facts while they are practicing their art.

It is said, too, that the teachers in such schools would come to be mere phrase-makers and rhetoricians. The man who teaches in such a post-graduate school ought to be the man of the greatest intellectual vigor that can be

engaged; for of course he must teach not only writing but thinking as well, as every worthy teacher of any subject must. This objection—that such schools will become schools of mere rhetoricians —means that both teachers and pupils will be weak and lazy. Why they should be weaker or lazier than the teachers and pupils of other schools is not plain.

But the most serious difficulty of all is that Americans lack the conception of writing as a teachable art, as the French, for instance, regard it. We regard the great writing of the past as the product of a sort of divine, unteachable gift, and the bad writing of the present as a poor utilitarian trade. We feel, therefore, that it is useless to try to train men who have supernatural gifts, if such men ever come again; and that it is beneath the dignity of universities, which train veterinarians and sociologists, to train men to do the slap-dash work of writing for a living. To change

this point of view—that is the very gist of the problem.

The very purpose of such a proposal as I make is to cause young men to look upon writing as a useful art, an art in which men may be trained as they are trained in any other art, so that slap-dash journalism and all other bad writing may, at some time, cease to be tolerated, and so that those who write what all the people read shall be honestly trained craftsmen of the pen who do their work worthily. Then, I fancy, literature will really take care of itself. Surely it is true that whatever influence increases the skill and lifts the pride and the dignity of any craft, strengthens the character even of its strongest men and builds up the character even of its weakest men; and every such influence makes that craft a better force in the world.